Her Right Divine

OLIVER KENT


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COMPANY
NEW YORK

HER RIGHT DIVINE

BY

OLIVER KENT

ILLUSTRATIONS BY

PAUL STAHR

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Her Right Divine

Go to him, ah, go to him, and lift your eyes aglow
to him;
Fear not royally to give whatever he may claim.
All your spirit's treasury scruple not to show to him.
He is noble—meet him with a pride too high for
shame.

Say to him, ah, say to him that soul and body sway
to him;
Cast away the cowardice that counsels you to
flight,
Lest you turn at last to find that you have lost the
way to him—
Lest you stretch your arms in vain across a star-
less night.

—From "The Roadside Fire,"

Amelia Josephine Burr.

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HER RIGHT DIVINE

CHAPTER I

The chances were that Hilary would have to make a night of it on the mountain. Attempting a short cut across the shoulder of Old Baldy, he had been drawn into a pocket that offered no apparent outlet. A pelting rain beat down out of a sodden sky. The black night pressed on him as though each pace might bring him against a wall. He was tired from the long day's tramp, but there was still the same spring to his step with which he had flung the miles behind him in long even strides. Something in the way he set his shoulders to the storm suggested a will tenacious as hammered iron.

He had come to a grove of young aspens that filled the gulch and clambered up its ragged sides. The foliage was heavy with moisture, and as he

pushed through the branches of the closely packed trees they scattered showers upon him.

Beyond the aspens the ravine opened to a grassy draw. Hilary stopped to get his bearings and a point of light caught his eye. It glimmered, went out, reappeared. Could it be a star? Surely not in this Egyptian darkness where all the sieves of the gods were busy flooding the earth. Moreover, it hung too low on the horizon.

He struck across the open toward it. The dip of the land hid the light point from him now and again, but always when he emerged from the hollows it shone like a beacon for him. So long did it guide his steps that his imagination began to find in it a symbol. To what was it leading him? What significance, if any, would it have? His life was at a turning point. He was going to meet a woman that waited for him. Was she *the one* woman? He did not know. Once he had thought so, but years had marched since he had seen her.

He laughed at his fragmentary fancies. What bearing could this light have on his future other than to give him the food and shelter he needed?

Probably it came from the cabin of some grizzled old prospector.

On a hillside sown sparsely with pines a little house nestled. The curtains were drawn, but from the window edges light spilled out. Some one was playing a piano.

Hilary's first knock brought no answer, but at the second the music ceased instantly. There was no sound but the splashing of the rain. Evidently the player was listening. The young man knocked again. Footsteps crossed the room and the door was thrown open.

On the threshold stood a young woman, by her side a noble staghound. Lightly her hand rested on its lifted head.

"I am lost. Can I get food here and shelter for the night?"

She looked into a strong bronzed face set above lean wide shoulders, into gray eyes which met her own steadily. Through the tan of his cheeks flamed the red glow of health. In the way he wore his serviceable clothes there was a kind of careless, confident ease. From the poise of his head and the car-

riage of his body she drew an impression of wide outdoor spaces of wind and sun. The stamp of virility was upon him.

At once she made up her mind.

"Food, of course—and a fire. Afraid I can't ask you to stay for the night. I am alone. But come in."

She motioned him to a big armchair in front of the open fireplace.

"I'm pretty wet," he apologized.

"You'll soon dry there."

He looked at the comfortable leather chair. "I was thinking of the furniture."

"Don't," she advised, with a smile. "It can't catch cold, and you can."

Hilary slipped out of his raincoat and hung it on a rack in the hall. He observed that the hardwood floor was covered with Navajo rugs and that the furniture was substantial and well selected. Evidently this was the summer mountain home of well-to-do people. In the shaded lamplight, a blazing fire of piñon knots throwing out a cheerful glow, the room brought to the desert dweller a poignant

memory of a home that death had obliterated. The wall of books, the table littered with fancy work and magazines, the subdued harmony of all the details—these were like the taste of cool water to a parched traveler in his own Arizona.

With that instinct for satisfying a man's hunger that is second nature to some women, his hostess was already making preparation for supper.

"I was walking from Summit to Brentford," he explained. "I tried a short cut across Old Baldy and got lost. At last I saw your light."

"Brentford is three miles from here. I can put you on the road."

From a cupboard she was taking knives and forks and dishes. The lines of her teagown, unbroken save for the natural curves of the fine figure, revealed her tall and of a slender grace, lightly built but with more than a suggestion of rich warm womanhood in the rhythmic movements of the supple body. As she moved across the floor he saw that she was full-throated and deep-chested in spite of her apparent slimness and that no Greek goddess ever carried herself with a more exquisite dignity.

After she had set the table her long tapering fingers, perfectly kept, hovered over the tea things deftly. For the first time the light from the reading lamp fell full upon her face. It showed Hilary a countenance charged with the mysteries of reserve. As to the details, a proud straight nose with sensitive nostrils, brave soft eyes the shade of which defied analysis, a clear colorless complexion that lent emphasis to the vivid crimson lips so delicately arched. It came upon him almost with a catch of his breath that there was no lovelier woman under heaven than this. From her little feet to the glorious copper crown of coiled hair that coroneted her pale beauty she was a creature apart, *sui generis*.

He was full of wonder about her. Who was she? What could a young woman, almost a girl, be doing alone at night in this lonely spot? Her whole environment made it evident that she knew the ways of society. But already the certainty was in him that she was a personality, one too strong and honest to be fettered by empty conventions. Behind those wonderful eyes lay a story. There are women whose hearts cry out passionately for life, just as

there are others fenced in from new vistas by middle-class mediocrity. Some spirits go eagerly to the Great Adventure because they must. In spite of her imperial coolness Hilary sensed that this girl was one of these.

He ate with the appetite which years in the open air give to a man of thirty.

"Breakfast at six this morning—nothing since," he explained, with a smile.

"No wonder you're hungry. Try some more of this cold ham."

"Thanks. Believe I will. Old Baldy's no joke to climb, even when you don't go to the top."

"It was a warm day, too."

"We wouldn't call it warm in Arizona."

She hesitated a moment. He was a stranger. On the other hand, he interested her. Why should she restrict their talk to impersonal commonplaces?

"You live in Arizona, then?"

"I'm a man without a country. My home is wherever I hang up my hat, and often that's in a tent. I've been in Arizona for two years in charge of a government reclamation project."

His hostess drew him on to tell of his work and its difficulties, of days in the sun and the wind and nights under the stars from which was being born a new empire. Her life had been a sheltered one among people of the leisure class. The men she knew were not all idlers, but such occupation as they had was of a sedentary nature. Their minds followed the conventional lines of the commonplace. But this man was one of the world's workers. He was no beggar on the streets of time, but paid his way by service. The gift of imagination was hers, and she could see how he had mastered himself by winning his fight against the grim desert. The sinewy strength of his neck, bronzed to the place where it met the flannel shirt, was very attractive. So, too, was the graceful poise of his small head and the way he flung back the shock of wavy sunburned hair from his forehead with a leonine toss.

"I suppose the frontier breeds strong men, doesn't it?" she asked, curious to discover what had given this man what he had so convincingly—the look of power expressing itself in a steady searching eye,

in a body knit like that of a boxer, straight as one of her own Rocky Mountain aspens, wide-shouldered and lean-flanked.

"There are weaklings everywhere."

"Even on the frontier where there is so much lawlessness and wickedness?"

He shrugged. "Adventurous blood goes a-pioneering. And lawlessness isn't always wickedness. Few people are bad. It is weakness and wrong thinking, not wickedness, that make most of the misery of life."

She looked at him, surprised, for he had voiced a growing conviction in her own heart.

"Yes, weakness and wrong thinking," she repeated. "And we think wrong because we haven't the courage to think right."

It was his turn to be surprised. She had learned that, had she? And she was scarcely more than a girl. Well, after all, life is written not in years, but in experience.

"Even when we think straight we daren't act so. We let our hands be tied with all sorts of lies because Society imposes them on us. The world is

full of respectable cowards who dare not call their souls their own."

She flashed another startled glance at him. He had touched the very crux of her musings these days, that Madame Grundy and the ghosts of dead yesterdays throttle life. She could not be what God and nature meant her to be because of the Thou-shalt-not of man-made laws.

Her interest in him quickened. It had been years since she had met a really vital man, for in the social rut the individuality is washed out by conformity. She was naturally of cardinal sympathies and through the drawn curtains of her set she had glimpsed new and larger standards beyond. But she had never been wholly free because her courage had been swamped by her environment.

"I suppose it depends on ourselves. We can go as far as we dare go and no farther," she suggested, gazing into the coals wistfully.

"It depends on what civilization has made us. Sometimes we are hampered by love, by honor, by duty. Even the twentieth century has its merits," he smiled.

"Ah! If one always knew what duty is. We beg the whole question there."

"Exactly."

He was thinking of his own problem just as she was of hers.

"Another cup of tea?" she asked, rousing herself to her duties as a hostess.

"No more, thank you. If many strangers as hungry as I was descend upon you they must eat you out of house and home."

"You are my first unexpected guest."

He thought her interest in his experiences justified the hazard of a personal question. "Then you haven't lived here long?"

"Not long." Her slight hesitation suggested reservations, as though modifying explanations were scarcely due a belated wanderer.

"Don't you find it lonesome on the mountain here?"

"I have David, my music, and my books."

The crouched dog lifted his head and nuzzled her gown as the girl mentioned his name.

"And you're not afraid?"

"Why should I be with David and two or three guns? Besides, what could hurt me?"

"Still, if I were one of your friends——"

"My friends have found me self-willed, I'm afraid," she smiled.

"Which means that you're not one of the respectable cowards who drift with the tide."

She glanced at him quickly. His harmless comment had been dropped lightly. But they had been moving fast toward each other in the past few minutes. As their eyes met that electric spark which is born of physical and mental affinity flashed from one to the other. The color beat its way to her cheeks so that for an instant her beauty was like the flush of a flame before it slowly died to an ivory pallor. Out of her shy questioning eyes looked the startled spirit of maidenhood. Then the mask of self-concealment fell again over the reticent face.

Hilary, conscious of a sudden clamor of the blood, a pounding of uncertain pulses, plunged into an inconsequent story to cover the embarrassment. He talked fast and not very coherently, for to his fingertips he was tingling with emotion. At first she had

been the cool and placid hostess to a stranger. He had seen her intellectual interest quicken. Now he had stirred the deeps that lay beneath the surface calm. It was as if through the touch of a magic wand had been poured into a marble statue the spirit of eager life.

He imagined her a virginal soul, but full-blooded, passionate in spite of her purity. One did not have the buoyantly poised head, the incomparable hair, the sumptuous grace of a Titian beauty for nothing. Fires of love were banked within her that would leap to life when she met her mate. Though fineness was of her essence, he knew that unconsciously she held within her an elemental richness of sex.

Yet presently he was ready to doubt it. She appeared to hear him with a gentle cool abstraction. Her voice was impersonal as the splash of a mountain brook. Exquisite in its soft strength, the rounded arm, shadowed above the elbow out of the wide sleeve, poured his tea without a tremor. Undisturbed, with just a faint suggestion of amusement, her gaze rested in his. She had escaped to intrenchments she did not intend he should scale.

The heat of the big wood fire drew the moisture from the clothes of Hilary. Outside the rain still pelted down steadily. He would have liked to stay here forever, but a wise instinct told him not to delay his going.

"How am I to find Brentford?" he asked, rising.

She gave him directions as he buttoned his raincoat.

"You've saved my life, of course, with your ham and your cold chicken and your tea. Since I can't repay you, virtue must be its own reward."

She nodded brightly. "Virtue *is* its own reward in this case. You're sure you know the way now? Straight down the gulch to its mouth, then the first road to the right. After you've gone a mile you'll see the lights of Brentford."

She had come to the door, chaperoned by her devoted slave David.

"Good night."

"Good night."

As her cool fingers touched those of Hilary he felt a little shock of delight. His hand closed on hers.

"You have been kind to a chance wayfarer. He can only say with old Bacon, God lead your Grace by the hand."

With a touch of old-time gallantry, he bent over her imprisoned fingers and kissed them.

She was surprised and a little uncertain, but her smile flashed adorably and provocatively as she dropped him a low curtsey.

"And keep you from all skaith and evil, Sir Knight."

There he left her, fearless and straight-limbed as Diana, her eyes following him into the shadows with an expression the memory of which was to haunt him for a long time.

The mystery of her walked with him through the weeping night. Tall with an effect of slenderness, the pride of race breathing from her long lithe torso, features not modeled but chiseled finely, amazing crimson lips in a face marvelously pale—every detail he recalled with a passion keen-edged. Such a woman! Of a luxurious charm for all her delicacy, vibrant and alluring yet pure as running water, she called to him like a strange sweet voice out of

the night. Surely they had not met only to part.

No names had passed between them by way of introduction. It would of course be easy to find out who she was. He had only to make inquiries at Brentford. But he rejected immediately such a tame termination of the adventure. If she had wanted him to know her name and her history she would have told him more. She had chosen rather to hold as the basis of their meeting that common ground of the spirit they had found. In this he would meet her halfway. It was already a point of honor with him to take her as she was regardless of adventitious circumstance, to ask no questions, to satisfy no curiosity.

She would be for him simply Her Grace of the Mountain.

CHAPTER II

Hilary slept soundly while the hands went round the clock. When he awakened it was to see a late sun shining on the hotel bedspread. He took his bath, shaved, and dressed in the civilized garb that had been sent to Brentford by express while he was walking across the country.

After he had arrayed himself carefully he went down to the office, inquired for his mail, and carried with him into the deserted breakfast room his sheaf of letters. Two or three of them were business ones, another was from his sister. These he glanced through hurriedly.

One square linen envelope, addressed in a large hand, with angular flourishes, he put beside his plate unopened. It lay there an unperformed duty all through his grape fruit and rasher of bacon. It was even neglected while he glanced through the headlines of the newspaper propped against the wa-

ter bottle. When at last he ripped open the envelope, diffusing as he did so a faint odor of heliotrope, his mental attitude was critical rather than indulgent. This was what he read:

"DEAR OLD BOY: Thanks for your wire. You've stood by me like a trump all through this thing. Well, I've got my decree at last. I'll tell you all about it when you get here.

"You should have heard the judge score J. K. I had to bite my lip to keep from smiling. He was simply furious. (I mean J. K., not the judge.)

"Never mind all that! I'm free of him, anyhow. The worry and our long waiting are at an end. You can't think what a weight is off my mind. I could shout for joy.

"Hurry, honey,

"To your own 'Toinette.

"P. S.—Excuse haste, as the Merricks are here. We're just starting for a motor trip through the state. You may catch me by wire at Denver on Thursday, care of the Savoy. They will drop me at Brentford on Friday.

"P. P. S.—Don't know whether this will get you before you leave Arizona, but am sending it on the chance. Heaps of love! I'm counting the hours till you come. A. B."

Hilary was annoyed, and rather ashamed of himself for feeling so. As he looked at it this was not an occasion for noisy exultation, even though it might be for quiet thankfulness. Any woman would be glad to be free of James K. Bock, but, after all, a divorce was an unpleasant confession of failure. He did not see any occasion for rushing out of the courtroom to a motor trip with the rather flamboyant Merricks. No doubt there had been a good many veiled allusions as to the reason she wanted to be left at Brentford. Why had she not slipped away quietly and taken the first train unnoticed by her friends? Unfortunately it was 'Toinette's way always to do things with a hurrah.

The situation was one of which Hilary was not proud. Since his folly had compromised her he would see the thing out by giving her his name, but he was not going to throw up his hat and shout about it. Somehow her note crystallized the resentment that had been unconsciously growing in him for a long time. The desert nights had given him plenty of time for reflection and the ardor of his passion had cooled. Absorbed in his work, there

had been days when he had never thought of her. It had once seemed that no price would be too great to pay for her, but he had not been so sure of himself lately.

He had tried to avoid thinking about the future. He had to pay, and at the worst he liked her very well. That was all there was to it. But this morning—with her perfumed note before him and with the memory of his hostess of the mountain quickening his blood—he was in no haste to present himself in the rôle of an ardent lover.

After a leisurely breakfast he walked up the street toward the Brentford Arms. He had never been in the little city before. Fresh from the arid Southwest as he was, its trim bungalows and orderly lawns impressed him.

"Has the quiet, well-kept air of a Boston suburb," he told himself.

Unconsciously Hilary had put his finger on the distinguishing characteristic of Brentford. Situated as the town was a mile above sea level, under the shadow of the Rockies, with the plains stretching eastward in a long slope to the Missouri River, the

stamp of the West was indelibly over the place. It sat "forever in the sun," as a poet had written, basking in the rare untempered light of the arid plateau. Brentford was of the West because it could not help itself, but it was of the East by definite choice. No town in Colorado was so impregnated with the spirit of the New England states as this little city. Cultured people, driven by the pressure of ill health, brought with them their family traditions and the customs of their class. These took root in a new environment and gave the place a trim and finished look of leisure.

A touring car whizzed past. He had no time to make sure, but his impression was that the lady sitting beside the driver was Antoinette.

The clerk at the Brentford Arms confirmed this impression.

"Mrs. Bock! Yes, she's staying here, but she just went out for a drive. Said if any one called to tell him she would be back this afternoon. Leave a card?"

"No-o. I'll call again."

Hilary breathed freer after his reprieve. The

thought of another woman was too present in his mind for him to want to meet Antoinette just yet.

Having nothing else to do, he took a walk to escape the restlessness that filled him. From the end of the street a great snow-clad peak of the Rockies appeared to rise abruptly. Hilary knew that many miles of plain and foothill really lay between him and its base, but his steps turned instinctively that way. Half an hour's brisk walking took him through the suburbs to the alfalfa fields beyond. He had not deliberately intended it so, but he was going directly toward the gulch where he had last night met the young woman who had entertained him. Presently he caught a glimpse of the cottage through the pines that clustered on the hillside in front of him. Since he could not without presumption call there so soon he deflected to the right, making for an *arroyo* that ran back into the hills.

It was a warm morning, and he was hot with walking. The mountain stream babbling down among the pines was refreshing as a cool sparkling drink on a summer day. Indolently he strolled forward to a dank dell into which the sun penetrated

only with a cloistered dimness. Wild roses and honeysuckles dripped sweetness. The banks of the brook were carpeted with moss and ferns. Hilary lay down and relaxed. The distant hum of bees, the notes of a mocking bird, the indefatigable stir of insect life came to his senses with a pleasant vagueness. Presently his lids drooped, opened drowsily, and closed again. He had fallen asleep to the murmur of water gurgling over stones.

He dreamed that he was looking at Titian's Assumption of the Madonna, and from that golden symphony of light and color stepped down the central figure with the rhythm and serenity of perfect womanhood. As he slept she moved graciously toward him.

Hilary awakened, and for a moment thought his dream had come true. Through the ferns a dryad was pushing, in her arms a sheaf of blossoms. Against the background of foliage the buoyant freedom of her poise was worthy of one of the nymphs to whom Pan piped. With all the delicate charm of the Venetian painter, she had, too, the long flexed lines of strength. As she moved the skirts clung to

her knees and molded themselves to the outlines of her limbs.

She was laughing at the mocking bird in a tree, head thrown back so that the white throat curve showed unbroken. Hilary's eyes never left her. His lips were parted as he watched her, a radiant challenge of nature to him. The swift desire of her coursed through his blood like champagne.

She turned, to find his gaze fixed on her intently. At sight of his strong supple body basking in the dappled shine and shade some primeval instinct stirred in her. A coral tide crept slowly into the ivory cheek. For in her the Pagan warred with the Christian. In surrender to duty she could be a rock-rimmed Puritan, but she could be, too, a sun worshiper, could know the religion and joy of beauty. There were times when life was for her only a tremulous delight. Then the youth in her was a-quiver, the little girl pushing out from the wasted years that had buried the natural gayety.

Hilary sprang to his feet. She was his hostess of the summer cottage.

"Am I trespassing? There was a fence, but it looked so cool down here I came anyhow."

"You were, but you're not now," she nodded lightly. "I make you free of the Forest of Arden. It belongs to anybody who appreciates, even though I hold the parchment titles."

"Then we're joint owners in the spirit, for I love it already."

"Nearly every day I come down here and hold my breath while the birds and the trees and the ants whisper things to me."

"Such things as what?"

"Oh, that we are on this good brown earth to live, to be free and natural, to be washed clean of meanness and intrigue by the rains of heaven."

"Yes, that's what the outdoor spaces teach us if we'll only listen, that all the complex lies of our social system are vanity and foolishness."

Her grave smile was a little troubled. "But—can we always determine between the lies and the truth of this life we have built up? Some of it is good. The laws that hamper and restrain are necessary, aren't they?"

"Yes. We are like birds in a cage. We beat our wings against the bars for freedom, but if we had it we wouldn't know what to do with it."

"So it's best to be content, and if we can't be glad because of our cage at least to be satisfied."

It was put as a statement, but her voice carried the inflection of a question. He understood that she was setting her own case before him.

Hilary hesitated. She looked pathetically young and girlish to be lost in such problems. The nature of her difficulty he could not guess, and knowing nothing of it he was in no position to offer advice.

"Doesn't it depend on who made the cage? If it's only there because of our limitations let's push through to freedom. But if it keeps us from harm—say from idleness or disloyalty or dishonor—then it really isn't a cage at all. The spirit can be free in any dungeon. Stone walls do not a prison make, you know. Socrates was freer in his cell when he drank the hemlock than his judges were outside. And now that the sermon's finished I'll pass the hat," he concluded, laughing at himself.

She threw off her weight of care and laughed with

him. "It was a good sermon anyhow. I've heard worse from many a pulpit. Thank you."

"I was really preaching it to myself and not to you," he apologized.

Her glance took in the sturdy slope of his neck and set of his shoulders, the effect of competent virility he gave forth, and her thoughts came to the surface in words.

"You don't look as if you needed that kind of a sermon."

"It happens I do, just now especially." As their eyes met he felt again the surge of an emotional climax. Through the tan of his bronzed face the blood swept to the roots of the wavy sun-reddened hair. "There's something I've got to do . . . and the closer I get to it the less I like it. I thought it would be easy enough . . . but it's not going to be."

"But you're going to do it."

The muscles stood out hard on his thin cheeks. "I'm going through with it. I'm going to play the game."

"Because of . . . honor?" She said it al-

most in a whisper as she stood close to him, eyes starry in the clean-cut face upturned to his.

"That's a big name for a mighty dubious business," he said, with a cynical laugh. "I've been a fool, that's all . . . some would say a knave."

"But you're going to pay like a gentleman?"

He shrugged. "If you want to wrap it up neatly. I'm not going to welch anyhow."

"I'd trust you for that."

"So you see I'm in a cage, too. I can beat my wings against the bars, but it won't do me any good."

"You're right in your guess. I'm in a cage," she told him gently.

"You poor little bird!"

"But I must keep singing, mustn't I?"

He nodded. "Your best and bravest song."

"Sometimes it isn't so bad. I want to sing, even in my cage."

"That's the way of life," he agreed, with his rare smile. "We're never quite so happy as we hope we're going to be and never so miserable as we fear."

"But . . . aren't there some who sing for the very joy of it, who miss second bests, don't have to travel through life on a tourist ticket?"

"Yes. There are some to whom the gods are good. Not many, I think. Most of us miss our chance . . . or find it too late. Some day society will be reshaped along better lines. There's too much waste now."

"Yes. That's it. Life is full of waste. We know it isn't right, but . . . we can't find the way out."

From the road that ran to the edge of the grove there came a shout. Out of a trap, to which was harnessed a Shetland pony, four children were tumbling precipitately.

"Daffy—daffy—daffydil," they screamed as they flashed, all moving legs and arms, through the glade.

The young woman's face was transformed. It bubbled with tenderness, with happy laughter. Flinging her arms wide, she waited for them, illumined with the spirit of Motherhood that finds a home in the hearts of all good women.

They threw themselves at her with little cries of delight, swarming round her like busy bees. Her arms enveloped them all as she stooped for their kisses. A faint flush had mounted to her transparent cheeks. She was absorbed by the little ones so that for the time she forgot all about Hilary.

"Oh, Daffy—Daffy, I drove—a long way—'most a mile, I gueth," lisped the smallest one, a little toddler of three.

Daffy—short for Daphne, it later appeared—was properly amazed. "Not all by yourself, Bobbie."

He nodded his curly head gravely three times, lips pressed together tightly. "Honeth, I did!"

She held him off and admired. "All by yourself?"

Bobbie's curls bobbed again. "Didn't I, Thilvia?"

"We just held his hands the teentiest bit," Sylvia corroborated.

Daphne snatched him to her and held him tight against her breast. "My, what a great big Bobbie! Driving just like a man."

Mary, who was number two in point of age, did

a little jig on the moss, out of the exuberance of her heart.

"His birthday is to-morrow," she contributed.

" 'N there's to be a party—ice cream 'n cake 'n things," explained Dorothy, number three.

Daphne introduced the children to Hilary. They were little friends of hers who frequently drove out from Brentford to raid her place.

"We're going to have lunch at the cottage, and if you're good you may come with us. Mayn't he, kiddies?" she concluded.

Her invitation almost took Hilary's breath. He glanced his thanks quickly at her, but she happened to be very busy pulling up Bobbie's stocking and did not look in his direction.

"I'll be the best ever," he promised fervently.

"Then you'll have to do exactly what you're told, sir. Bobbie and you may take the carriage round by the road while we cut across the hill."

Hilary swung the little man to his shoulder and strode off. "Ours not to reason why, Bobbie. Forward, march!"

Once only he looked back. Daphne was still in

the grove, trailing through the ferns with the little folks clinging to her hands, a virgin Madonna of heaven-born charm. His own words came back to him mockingly. "Most of us miss our chance . . . or find it too late." The thing was incredible. By all laws of right she was his, the white clean soul of her and the long slim body for the loveliness of which he was strangely hungry. He thought of Markham's noble poem, "The Homing Heart," and he wondered if the poet's concept of love was after all more than a dream, if ages ago Daphne and he had been meant for each other and their souls perhaps had drifted down the centuries toward this meeting. He found himself repeating verses to himself as he tried to fit them together.

"It was ages ago in life's first wonder
  I found you, Virgilia, wild sea-heart;
And 'twas ages ago that we went asunder,
  Ages and worlds apart.

. . . . . .

Perhaps we are led and our loves are fated,
  And our steps are counted one by one;
Perhaps we shall meet and our souls be mated,
  After the burnt-out sun.

For over the world a dim hope hovers,
  The hope at the heart of all our songs—
That the banded stars are in league with lovers,
  And fight against their wrongs."

He lifted Bobbie down to a seat in the trap. "What say, little mannie, shall we hang on to that hope?"

Master Bobbie, as it chanced, was pursuing an interesting theme of his own. "I'll be free years old to-morrow, 'n I can drive."

"Of course you can. No manner of doubt about it. Show me how you can handle the ribbons, son. How is it that stanza goes about the world's only treason? Let's see.

One thing shines clear in the heart's sweet reason,
  One lightning over the chasm runs—
That to turn from love is the world's one treason
  That treads down all suns.

Don't we wish we thought so, Bobbie? Wouldn't we make a dead set at Her Grace of the Mountain? But, hang it, a man must play the game, mustn't he? He can't quit just because the going gets heavy. Eh, Bobbie?"

" 'N I'm goin' to have a birfday cake 'n ice cream 'n everyfing 'cause I'm free years old," the youngster babbled.

"Go to it. Get all the fun you can, little 'un. After you're a grown-up you can't have 'everyfing'. If you get the ice cream there's nothing doing in cake."

"I'll give you some of mine."

"There's just one particular piece on the plate I want, Bobbie, and that piece isn't for me. Gordon Hilary hasn't been good enough. It's tough luck, but it's his own fault. The gods are just, you know, and of our pleasant vices make whips to plague us."

"Daffy always gives us cake."

"I believe you, Bobbie. Daffy's in love with kiddies. Between you and me, sir, you don't half appreciate your luck."

CHAPTER III

Daphne with the little folks was to Hilary a wonder and a delight. She played at all sorts of make-believes convincingly. No trouble was too much to take. Her interest never flagged because she enjoyed every minute of the fun. And when they were tired of racing about she gathered them under her wings by the big fireplace and dramatized for them the most amazing fairy tales. She made them laugh, brought lumps into their throats, held them with dilated eyes fixed on her face. It was hard for Hilary to think of this vivid creature, by turns merry as a girl and tender as a mother, as the one whose sad eyes had spoken from soft shadows with an appeal for help out of life's tangle. Now there was a gay ring in her laughter, happiness in her flexible voice. If she made the children love and worship her it was because she first lavished her affection upon them. The Westerner had never be-

fore seen one so avid of vicarious motherhood.

The little folks stayed for a picnic tea in Daphne's Forest of Arden. Hilary made the camp fire after the frontier fashion and showed the children how to broil bacon on the end of a stick. After they had eaten there was one last romp before they left.

"Just one more game, kiddies. What shall it be?" Daphne asked them.

"Hide and go seek. I'm it," Dorothy shrieked; and "Hide and go seek" the others chorused.

For the children this was always the hilarious end of one of their jolly "Daffy days." Now the grove rang with laughter, shouts and protests. Long thin legs trampled the moss in wild flights for "Home." The robins cocked their heads to one side and looked down sagely on this revelry of that strange biped man.

"One—two—three—four—five," Sylvia began to count, her buried head against the bark of the tree.

There was a hurried scattering of the clan to cover. Hilary fled down the brook, crossed it on the big stones kept there for that purpose, and sank among the large ferns on the opposite bank.

"Fift'-six—seven—eight—nine—sixty," Sylvia was industriously piping.

A swish of draperies and Daphne, having safely hidden Bobbie, came flying down the brook. Light as a wood nymph, graceful as a panther, she skipped from stone to stone. The breeze stirred her skirt and showed a twinkling little ankle. Running along the bank, she reached the deep ferns.

For an instant she stood poised like a startled deer gathering for flight.

"You here!" she gasped, taken aback.

Exercise had lent color to her charms. A soft glow suffused her cheeks, made vivid the beauty of the small coppery head and finely chiseled face. She was eager, warm, radiant, the embodiment of joyous and full-flowered youth.

> "Bushel of wheat, bushel of rye,
> All 't ain't ready, holler I,"

floated to them from the home base.

She sank to a seat on a boulder near him. Crouched side by side, they peered through the ferns at the child seeking them. The fresh, sweet per-

fume of her young flesh mounted to his brain. A flying strand of her hair brushed lightly his temple and went through him like an electric shock. In that vague light she was a lithe-limbed slender dryad, yet somehow, too, a creature of fire and spirit alive to the tingling finger tips. He could hear her panting from her hurried run to cover, could see the rise and fall of her bosom. Her lips were like a red, red rose in a mass of creamy blossoms. Caught in a swirling tide of emotion, he set his teeth to steady himself. His hand crept out and touched lightly her gown. If she knew she gave no sign. He guessed that she dared not look at him, that she, too, was engulfed in a storm of feeling.

"Daphne," he whispered.

She flashed one shy look at him, chiding but questioning. The meeting of their eyes was a kiss of the soul. Waves of trembling surged over her. The long soft eyelashes drooped to her hot cheeks.

"Daphne," once more he whispered, almost in the little ear that shone through the veil of her hair like coral through seaweed.

"You—mustn't." Her tremulous voice was almost inaudible.

But the challenge of sex was too much for her reluctance. As by a magnet he drew again her eyes.

"Don't," she pleaded, in the least of voices.

Through them both flowed the fire of an awakened longing. In the dusk her lips turned slowly to his. At the touch of her surrendered face, all glowing with the poignancy of her emotion, Hilary knew the kiss of his dreams. She trembled toward him, her soft warm body pressing against his. He felt for a moment the quick irregular beat of her heart. Then she was gone, flying through the ferns like a frightened rabbit.

"I see Daffy," Hilary heard Sylvia shout, and after a rush for the home base, "One—two—three for Daffy."

So long as the game lasted both Hilary and Daphne avoided meeting each other's eyes. They pretended faithfully that they were all attention to the demands of Hide and Go Seek, but the call of a bigger game had taken the zest out of their make-believe.

"Time to go home, kiddies," their hostess announced at last.

"Oh, must we? Already?" the youngsters begged.

"This—very—minute," Daphne insisted, with mock solemnity.

They ran helter-skelter for the trap. After many farewells the little people were tucked in properly and the Shetland pony trotted away in fat dignity.

"Good night, Daffydil," Mary shouted back.

"Good night, Marigold, and all you other little flowers. Give my love to mother and tell her to let you come again."

The trap full of merrymakers grew shadowy in the gathering gloom.

Daphne turned to Hilary. She was standing straight as a poplar and there was a kind of proud shame in the poise of her lifted head.

"Why did we do it?" she asked.

"Because we couldn't help it," he answered gravely. "Because

> '. . . we are led and our loves are fated,
> And our steps are counted one by one.'

Don't you believe in Fate?"

"Do you?"

"I don't know. I never have before. I've always thought a man was what he made himself or what circumstances made him. But I don't know . . . I don't know."

"It's an easy way out of it to lay the blame for our failures on Fate," she told him, with a faint smile of self-scorn.

"Yes. We can't get out of it that way," he admitted. "It *was* Fate in a sense. A man and a woman don't live a wide world apart and come together as we have merely by chance. Something born of the spirit has touched us. But, after all, we've got to take up the responsibility ourselves. That's what life is for—to make us stronger than Destiny."

"Yes . . ." A perilous weakness stole over her body and through her limbs, but the will in her was like steel.

"We must do what is right. . . . If we knew what right was."

"I know," she told him steadily. "It is to say

His lips found the shadowy eyes, the curve of her cheek, the flaming mouth, and again and again he ravished them with fierce tenderness.

She pushed him away at last. "That is enough . . . Listen. . . . No, but listen, *dear*."

"Say that again. Tell me that you love me, Daphne."

"What is your name—your first name? Don't tell me your other."

"Gordon."

"Put your hands down by your sides and keep them there."

He let his arms fall.

She stood very close to him. "I love you, Gordon. I have never loved a man before. Until I die I'll love you, dear."

And she kissed him on the lips.

He gave a little cry of joy.

"Now you must go, without touching me again, straight to your duty, my dear," she commanded, in her low clear voice.

"There will never be another woman in my life but you . . . never!" he told her hoarsely.

With that he turned and strode down the road.

She stood till he was out of sight, then gave a pitiful little sob and moved, her eyes filmed with tears, back to her Forest of Arden. Across the stepping stones she went and along the brook to the spot where they had sat together and she had given him her first kiss.

Where his body had crushed the ferns there was a mold of his form. Her lip trembled. His spirit still seemed very present, still wooed her with the wild passion that yet was clean as her own wind-swept mountains. But he had gone away—gone to another woman. She knew it as well as if he had told her so in as many words. Why had she sent him, with all the long years of her life stretching before her empty and drear? Surely love had some rights. At best love like theirs was the rarest thing in the world. Must she then play traitor to it because in the eyes of society it was irregular? She knew that the judgments of Madame Grundy are based not on essential right and wrong, but on the forms. Violate appearances, and you are guilty.

Preserve the form, though all within be false, and society is satisfied.

Standing among the lush ferns, with the movement of renewed life all about her, the crepitation of insects, the sweet sudden call of the lark to his mate, there throbbed through her an intense longing to have done with pretense and live her own life. Her wasted womanhood, splendid and tender, was crying out passionately for its rights. She wanted to be a wife and a mother, to spend herself freely and abundantly for the kisses of a strong man and for sweet tender mouths clinging to her breast. She wanted to have done with this flat semblance of existence and begin to live to the full.

CHAPTER IV

As Gordon Hilary walked back to Brentford in the cool of the evening his mind surged with chaotic impulses of rebellion against the chains that bound him. Love had found him at last, the one true love of his life, and he had to turn his back on it. For the thing that men call honor held him tied hand and foot. The threads of his existence had become tangled with those of a woman and it was too late to unknot them now without injustice to her. No matter that he loved another woman. His duty was to the first. He had made his own bed. If he found it full of nettles still he must lie in it.

He carried his hat in his hand to catch on his hot brow the light breezes of the night. He was striding along at a great pace, unconsciously trying to keep step with his turbid thoughts. A motor car churned up from the rear and passed him with a rush. Beside the driver sat a woman. This time he was sure that the woman was Antoinette Bock.

A sardonic smile came to his lean face. She had written that she was counting the hours till he came. Apparently she was trying to bear up cheerfully while she counted them. On the whole he was glad she was amusing herself. It lifted from him the burden of calling immediately. With Daphne's kisses still warm on his lips he did not want to go straight to another woman for hers. To-morrow would belong to 'Toinette, and all the to-morrows after that, but to-night was sacred to the memory of Her Grace of the Mountain.

He went to his room and locked the door. Sitting at the open window, he stared out into the night and lived over again the day. For all that they had renounced each other life surged in him with triumphant blood beats. He had won her, the soul of her, that virgin inner citadel which never yet had yielded to man. It was at bottom the spirit of her he loved, the pure nobility that craved life and beauty and the experiences due as a sacred privilege to every woman. With the clairvoyance of love both of them had gone to the heart of things regardless of convention.

His senses played him tricks. She rose before him now in the silvery moonlight so clear that he felt he could touch her. In that slim young rounded body her spirit had found its perfect home. The rhythm of her motion, so light and firm, made him want to sing a lover's rhapsody. How gallant was the poise of her tawny head! And her eyes, cool and tender and eager almost in the same instant, . . . it was curious how they seemed to be now black as sloes, now deep violet, now purple, even amber to his fascinated gaze.

He had seen what a radiantly merry beauty she could be. He had seen her troubled over the futility of life. And again he had known her all broken with the stress of emotion, her sweet face aglow with tenderness and passion and the nobility of renunciation. A dozen women lived in the soft flesh she wore as a garment, and each one of them was a delicate spirit of fire, vivid as the thrush in song.

Out into the night he stretched his arms to her, and it was only cold comfort he drew from Markham's tenuous hope:

"Our ways go wide and I know not whither,
But my song will search through the worlds for you,
Till the Seven Seas waste and the Seven Stars wither,
And the dream of the heart comes true."

It was long after midnight before he left the window to attempt sleep. Daylight was sifting into the room before at last he fell into light slumber.

But Hilary was up in season and his card was in the hand of the clerk at the Brentford Arms before the breakfasters had left the dining room. Mrs. Bock was at home, and over the telephone the clerk was told to send Mr. Hilary up to her private sitting room.

Antoinette came forward to meet him with gay insouciance, bubbling with exclamations of delight which she punctuated with kisses.

"You dear boy! I've been *so* anxious to see you. . . . When did you get in? And why didn't you wire so that I could meet you?"

"I got in yesterday morning. Couldn't wire you the exact time because I walked across from Summit."

"And you've been here twenty-four hours without

seeing me. Bad boy!" She held up a finger and threatened him archly.

Hilary thought he detected through her airy effusion a hint of embarrassment. Her big eyes flashed a quick sidelong look at him that asked a covert question.

"I've seen you—twice," he smiled.

"Oh, but—when?" And again her glance seemed to demand whimsically how much he knew.

"Yesterday, at 10:33 a. m., and again at 7.41 p. m. I was walking along the road, a humble pedestrian."

"I must have been in Dick's motor car."

"I believe you've guessed it."

"We're old friends, Dick and I."

"Dick is lucky in his friends."

"Nice of you to say that."

"Could I say less? I'm sure he would agree with me."

"Dick Lambert, you know."

"Exactly—Dick Lambert, whom, by the way, I don't know, but hope to some day."

"Oh, you'll like him." And she dismissed Dick

carelessly from the conversation. "But what a shame you were waiting around so long in this poky hole. If I'd only known! It's your own fault for not wiring."

"So it is. I don't blame you in the least—or Dick."

"What under heaven did you do all yesterday?"

"I took a walk into the country."

"Mercy! You must have been bored to extinction. Who ever heard of anybody *walking* in the country?"

"It's a criminal offense. One gets so in the way of motorists."

Toinette laughed. She was getting back into her conversational stride. "You haven't changed a bit, Gordon. You always did look at things so queerly. And you're just as big and lean as ever, and three shades browner."

"Blame Arizona for that."

"You must have just expired with lonesomeness out there. Poor old boy, I was so sorry for you."

"I had my work."

"But precious little fun. I felt selfish, back here with the comforts of civilization."

"No need why you should have. The sight of you no doubt made some of your friends happy."

"You always were an optimist," she laughed.

"And some unhappy," he added.

"Unhappy?" Her dancing eyes demanded an explanation.

He bowed. "That was the word I used."

"I don't think I like that," she told him dubiously.

"Oh, yes, you do. It wouldn't be very exciting to have all your admirers quite happy and contented."

"Oh, if you mean it that way."

"That's how I mean it. Shall we sit down over there while I hear your news, Toinette?"

While she told him to the last detail the story of her divorce Hilary studied her with cool eyes. There was over them now none of the enchantment with which he had viewed her two years earlier. Well-gowned, sumptuous, still very handsome in fleshly fashion, Hilary found her somehow too carnal for his taste. He admitted that she was a good

fellow, none better, but he missed any note of the spiritual. She still had her charms, but they were no longer a whip to his desires. That she was already fencing with the encroaching years he guessed. Her complexion was a creation of massage, powders, ointments and infinite pains. In her close-fitting stylish gown she was only luxuriously ripe, but given a costume maker of less skill and she would have been frankly stout. Her good looks advertised themselves opulently. There was about her, he thought, more than a suggestion of the artificial, but he put the fancy from him as treason.

The buzz of her room telephone called Mrs. Bock. With a nod of apology to Hilary she sailed across to the receiver.

"Yes. . . . Yes. . . . Oh, Dick! Well, I can't come now. *He's* here." She murmured an amused laugh with a glance at Hilary. "Better run away now and play, Dickie. Come round again in—well, say in half an hour. I want you to take us out in your car."

Antoinette came back laughing. "He's a persistent chap, Dick is."

"So I should judge."

With a sideways tilt to her chin, impish laughter in her deep-lidded eyes, she offered further information.

"And just a little jealous of Mr. Gordon Hilary."

"If I'm in the way——" he was beginning dryly.

"The idea! Of course you're not. We've hardly had six words yet. We've got heaps to say. Have a cigarette."

Hilary rarely smoked cigarettes, but he did not want to pose as a prig. He struck a match, held it till her Egyptian was glowing, then lit his own.

Antoinette leaned back languidly among the pillows and looked at her fiancé through half-shuttered eyes. Her fingers were laced behind her neck so that the full tapering arms, bare to the elbow, showed to the best advantage. Hilary felt an instinctive disapproval of the invitation to admire that was so patently offered. He knew that in this respect Antoinette sinned less than many other respectable women. Her gown was perfectly correct. It was the last word in the present-day mode. But to this man, fresh from the clean wind-swept out-

doors, there was something in the cut of such gowns as hers—fitted to show suggestively the very lines of the veiled form—more shameful than honest nakedness. Antoinette had many sterling qualities, but like many thoroughly conventional women she seemed to regard her body as a trap to snare the imagination of men.

"Now tell me all about yourself, old boy," she ordered.

He told her briefly what he had to tell. But he told it dryly, with none of the dramatic vigor he had used in telling the same story to another woman a few hours earlier. He gave bare facts, so that his hearer saw nothing of the charm or the horror of that desert he had been fighting to subdue.

Presently he discovered that her interest had flagged in what he was saying. She had not the imagination to project the scene he was describing. Antoinette Bock was not one of those women whose talk must be confined entirely to trivial gossip and small talk of a personal character. But naturally she looked for the note of intimacy from a lover returned from the frontier after a long absence.

Hilary had left her still in the grip of a swift passion. But the long months of absence had done their work. Neither of them felt the drag of the emotional tide. The salt of the affair was gone. For one thing it had lost its illegitimate flavor. So it chanced that neither of them was sorry when the ubiquitous Dick arrived to interrupt their tête-à-tête.

Lambert was a dark slender man, quick of motion, with deep liquid eyes smoldering from under long curved lashes. Through his olive complexion the blood glowed richly. A small French mustache, black as ink, turned up from the sulky lip. To the effect of foreignness an English suit of irreproachable cut and neatness contributed its share. The verdict of the first glance would adjudge him a strikingly handsome man. Later one would doubt the soundness of such a judgment. Hilary, with instinctive dislike, guessed his new acquaintance was what is known as a lady's man. His smug trimness and complacent assurance set the lines of the engineer's mouth in contemptuous criticism.

Dick cut in at once to make of Hilary an out-

sider. His talk was punctuated with little personal allusions the other man could not understand. Just back from New York, he was full of trivial gossip about the songs in the latest musical comedies and the girls who sang them. The engineer listened quietly with the faintest of ironical smiles on his leathery face.

Antoinette divined Lambert's purpose and good-naturedly frustrated it.

"We'll show you this country as you ought to see it, Gordon—from a motor car. What do you think, Dick? He's been *walking* over these hill roads," Mrs. Bock explained, with a little *moue*.

"And enjoying my walks," Hilary contributed, with a smile.

Dick ignored the other man. "I'm about fed up with Brentford," he suggested languidly. "It's a beastly dull hole, you know. To stand a month of this place is a painful game. Think I'll change the bowling and run East. A man's off his chump to stay here long."

Hilary understood perfectly that Lambert was not an Englishman, but one of those inane Ameri-

cans who ape the slang and manners of the British. Brentford was the home of a good many English families who had come to the Rocky Mountains for its climate. Dick was in the habit of telling these exiles confidentially that America was only half baked, you know; wouldn't be worth living in for a hundred years at least. One glance at him was enough to show the engineer that he had never done an honest day's work in his life. To endure hardship or discomfort was totally foreign to his experience. A parasite on the face of the earth, he lived for his sensations. Gordon wished he could put him out on the desert for a month to show him what a futile thing he was. The cheapest peon he had on the job was master of this fine gentleman who depressed his nerves with tobacco and spurred them with highballs and counted achievement in terms of his affairs with women.

Mrs. Bock glanced at Lambert with impatient tolerance. "Oh, we know all about you, Dick. You're always getting bored because you haven't sense enough to be amused. But you needn't waste your superiority on us. What I want to know is

whether you're going to show Mr. Hilary and me around in your car like a good boy—or whether you're going to sulk."

The young man came to heel like a badly trained pup, sullenly.

"What's the use of getting whiffy? My car's waiting. It's at your service, Toinette."

"Then there's nothing more to be said. You'll show us the sights of the place and we'll say 'Thank you.' "

"Glad to take you anywhere you say."

"Better leave me out of this," Hilary said lightly.

Toinette whirled on him. "Not on your life, Gordon. Now don't *you* turn balky."

"I meant merely that since Mr. Lambert——"

"He's *crazy* to take us out. Aren't you, Dicky?"

"Clean balmy in the crumpet," grinned Lambert, making the best of it. "Really, I'll be glad to show you around a bit, Mr.—er—Hillwick."

"Hilary," suggested the owner of that name.

"Beg pardon. Hilary, of course. Rotten memory, you know."

Mrs. Bock bore in breezily like a battleship with

all flags flying. "Well, that's all settled. We're all friends and good fellows. Now where shall we go?"

"How about the High Line drive?"

"Good enough, Dick. We'll take luncheon at the Delmas Hotel. Suit you, Gordon?"

Hilary shrugged. He could not very well get out of it without a scene. "I'm in the hands of my countrymen."

"Then I'll arrange for a hamper to be packed," Antoinette said quickly, and pressed a button in the wall.

Half an hour later they were rolling smoothly out of the suburbs of the town. About a mile out they met a runabout driven by a woman. Gordon caught a glimpse of a slender upright body and a red-lipped pale face set in a crown of lustrous copper hair.

Lambert stifled a "Damn!" His face was dark with sulky annoyance. But both his hat and Hilary's came off together.

They had passed Daphne, the Lady of the Mountain.

CHAPTER V

Antoinette Bock was not one to let any ghosts sit at the feast with her. Any momentary embarrassment she may have felt at the discovery by Hilary of her flirtation with Lambert was of short duration. It was her way to insist on gayety from those about her. All she asked of them was that they take life as if it were a jolly lark.

Lambert recovered his good humor before they had traveled far and Gordon played up to them as best he could. He did not care much for the small riotings they esteemed an evidence of their fun and he did not for a moment fool himself into the belief that he was having the time of his life. But that was no reason why he should put a damper on their spirits.

"I'm not much of a gay dog," he explained ruefully to Antoinette after Lambert had dropped them at the Brentford Arms in time for dinner. "I sup-

pose the hard grim work of the desert takes that sort of thing out of a man."

She nodded cheerfully across the table at him. "You're all right, Gordon. I'm a regular cyclone myself for keeping things going and I like to have noisy people around me. But when it comes to—well, when it comes to keeps"—she smiled at him and dropped her eyes discreetly—"that's another proposition. I can rattle enough for two."

She was beginning to find in him again that quality which had so disturbed her serenity at the time they first met. This tall spare desert-browned man had in him something that made for power. He was as dependable as steel. Antoinette herself was not at all stable. She tired of one toy easily and flew to another. But there was a deep-rooted conviction in her that she would not tire of Gordon Hilary. In spite of her flightiness she was a woman of shrewd sense. She saw him for what he was, a strong resolute man who would go far in his own field. It was, she knew, much more likely that he would tire of her than she of him. And the very thought of this, the doubt as to her power of hold-

ing him, increased his value in her eyes and drew her to him. If she was no longer quite in love with him at least she was ready to blow the old coals to a flame whenever he said the word.

But Hilary had not the least intention of saying the word. He would marry her, but he would not pretend to be in love with her. In his heart he knew it was folly. He sat in the drab wreck of the dream he had wrought around her. Romance had fled and left only the sordid trappings that had decked her. To marry her would be a mistake, but he owed her his name and he would pay the debt. As soon as the law had pronounced them man and wife he would get back to his work in the desert. Once a year or so he would come back to her for a month, and they would sit across the breakfast table from each other and smile with polite weariness while their brave fond words denied the grating truth both acknowledged in their hearts. There was no spiritual affinity between them. He liked her now, but how long would he care for her when it was forced upon him as a duty? Not long, he guessed. Already he was impatient at the little

things which only love can overlook in a wife, at her overemphasized gayety, her frivolity, her devotion to good food, her tendency to flirt with every available man.

It would have been bad enough if he had never met Daphne. Now it was infinitely worse. His whole being was flooded with a pure passion for this creature of fire and dew, so spirited, so intelligent, so alluring in the grace of her personality. There was no room for any one else. She was in the back of his mind when he was motoring with Antoinette, when he was dining with her, when he was taking part in the gay talk of her and her companions. As soon as he was alone everything else slipped to the background. His imagination summoned Daphne, and she floated to him light-footed as a dream fairy.

In every fiber of him he longed to see her again. The little details of her charm tortured him—the tender mocking smile, the sweep of dark lashes over dusky eyes, the oval from ear to chin that somehow suggested the lean lines of a fine-trained race horse. The need of seeing her, of hearing the low vibrant

voice that was a trumpet call to his emotions, surged through him in waves. Only his steely will kept him from going to her with the confession that he could not stay away, that he was sick with the desire of her.

And even his self-control could not keep him from the place where he had met her. He would not go during the day or early evening, but after night of the third day had fallen he tramped out the cañon road till her cottage was in sight. He had come with no expectation of seeing her, for his watch told him it lacked now only a few minutes of twelve. No lights were shining from the windows to suggest that perhaps she was still awake and up.

Vaulting a fence, he strode up the arroyo to the dell she had called the Forest of Arden. In the silvery night, with the faint breeze and a frolicsome moon playing queer tricks with the long shadows from the pine boughs, he thought the spot well named. Every tree that rustled in the wind seemed to speak of Daphne. Each moment he half expected to see her come floating out of the glade.

SHE STOOD PANTING, THE OVAL OF HER FACE STANDING OUT WHITE IN THE PALE MOONLIGHT. *Page 75.*

The silence of the soft night lay over the spot. Never had he known a midnight more exquisitely attuned to poetry. Noiselessly Hilary crossed the stepping stones. Presently his feet carried him to the ferns where they had hidden together by chance for that full-pulsed minute at the end of which their lips had silently confessed love.

From the shadow of a pine a slender figure flashed and fled. Hilary, struck motionless by this nymph-like apparition, stood rooted to the ground. Yet a moment, and he was in full chase. She ran fast; with a supple strength of limb and body, darting sharply to right or left as his long stride gained. Twice his hands caught at her, but she doubled at unexpected tangents like a hunted rabbit. The shaft of a searchlight was no more elusive than she.

When at last he brought her to bay it was with her back to a pine. She stood panting, the oval of her face standing out white in the pale moonlight but for the vivid scarlet of the parted lips. The eyes of his sweetheart, always to him the wonder of the world, were shy and frightened.

Love of her flamed up in him as does a fire in dry

leaves. The muscles of his lean jaw knotted like whipcord under the stress of repression.

"Daphne! Thank God!" broke abruptly from his lips.

Her bosom rose and fell rapidly. Out of her great eyes she looked at him silently.

"My dear, I've been wanting you. . . . Sometimes I've been mad to see you. . . . Oh, I'm glad you're here. . . . I'm glad. . . . I'm glad." His voice trembled with the joy that flowed through him.

Falteringly she explained: "I came out . . . because . . . it was so close inside . . . I . . . I thought . . ."

"You came to meet me," he exulted confidently. "You didn't know it. If you had you wouldn't have come. But for once the gods have been good to us."

"What . . . do you want?"

"You, dear heart. . . . You. . . . You."

One swift movement and the pulsing body was in his arms. Into the face of delicate porcelain beneath the soft waves of burnished hair his hot kisses

were drawing a glow of color. The touch of her quivering lips, the contact of her fresh young body trembling against his from knee to breast, sent exquisite delight through him at every heartbeat. It was as if the warm sweet youth of her were stealing into his blood like some divine wine of the gods.

"We . . . mustn't," she breathed.

He stifled her protest with kisses.

Her eyes closed, her head fell back against his strong arm. A delicious languor sapped the strength from her yielding body. Into the night throbbed the sudden exultant note of a mocking bird. A swirling caldron of mist encompassed them. The race of the tide dragged at their anchors.

With surprising strength her little hands pushed him back.

"No . . . no . . . no!" Her cry was both a sob and a command.

Hilary's arms dropped. The reproach of her gaze stabbed him.

"My friend! Have you forgotten?"

"Everything but that I love you," he flamed.

His love was mirrored in her face, but there was

something else there, too—the ineffable wistfulness of renunciation.

"Have you forgotten . . . so soon?"

"You've been with me every day and every night. There hasn't been an hour since I first met you that you haven't been close as breathing."

"I know . . . I know." Her voice was glad in spite of its sadness. "Do you think I haven't had you with me, too? I came out here to-night because . . . it was out here in the ferns that . . . that you first made me happy."

"You're glad you met me, then?"

"I'm glad . . . to the bottom of my soul. I shall be unhappy . . . after you go. But even when I'm most unhappy it will be a joy to me that I have known you."

By a lift of the chin, a quick turn of the body, the faintest quiver of the voice, she had opened wide for him the door of her heart. She had to suffer, as is the way of women who renounce, but there was no weakness of self-pity or hysterical demand for sympathy. She made no secret of her love, was proud of it as all noble women are of clean passion.

Even though she must sacrifice herself it had made life fuller. In that she would find compensation for the pain she must endure.

Hilary looked at her with an admiration he did not attempt to hide. "I never met a woman like you. . . . You stand the acid. But that's just the trouble." He gave a little gesture of despair. "The finer I see you are the more I love you. . . . I can't get away from you. My thoughts come back."

Her lips curved to a faint wan smile. "I ought not to say so, dear, but . . . I want you to go on loving me. I'm just a woman, and I can't help it. But your love must be a lamp that burns in you just for yourself. It mustn't change your actions. Our feet are set in ways that don't lead to each other."

"They led me here and you here," he insisted stubbornly.

Through her splendid young body the wine of life leaped. What he said was true. Something had drawn them together in spite of their strong wills, had brought them into the night to a meeting neither

had expected. They were alone, a thousand miles from the censorious conventional world, all about them the soft night lapped in a tide of beauty rich and mellow. The sieve of Fate had shaken them here. Was it their fault they came like steel to a magnet straight to each other's arms?

"And now they will lead us apart," she reminded him.

"It can't be. Life isn't so futile a thing. When it invites only the coward runs away."

"Ah! But you don't believe that. Must I preach your own sermon to you?"

"How do I know what I believe?" he cried. "When I'm with you I know our love is right, the best thing in me. We can't throw it away. Youth is only for an hour and life for a day."

His hands went out and caught hers eagerly.

"*La vita fugge, e non s'aretta un ora,*" she murmured. "Old Petrarch, you know. Life flies apace and tarries not an hour."

"Of course. Love is for the wise and sacrifice for the foolish." Confident conquering youth rang in his voice, sat lightly on his broad shoulders.

"The still, still night," she sighed, with a little shudder.

For she was fighting, too, against the enchantment of the night as well as against the mounting passion of her lover and her own desire. A strange sweet emotion called her to the exquisite surrender that is the seal of woman's love.

He held her hands wide apart so that her body was drawn close to his. Her lips submitted gladly, with a splendid humility, to the pressure of his. There stole over her the deep satisfaction that only real passion can give.

But still she fought, even while her feet slipped.

"Dear, don't. . . . If you care for me . . . Gordon . . . My soul flows out to you. . . . Oh, you don't know how much. . . . I am yours, but—be good to me—be good to me."

The shadowy eyes that looked into his seemed to fill the whole white face. A flood of tenderness warmed him. The tears scorched his eyes. This divine creature was his. If she had intended it so she could have devised no appeal so potent to the

manhood in him. Her very weakness counted for strength, since it set him on honor to defend it. Even while he held her in his arms he was putting a strong rein on the elemental man in him.

"You're right. . . . We must have time to think. I've been mad, dear. That way won't do for us."

He released her suddenly. His nerves were strung taut as the strings of a fiddle.

"You're not . . . hurt?" she asked softly.

"No . . . no. It isn't that, dear heart. But —let's get out of here. I'll see you home."

Gratitude looked shyly out of her eyes at him.

"If you will . . ."

They walked in silence to the road and followed it up the hill to the cottage. Gordon moved in a tumult of emotion.

At the door he stopped.

"We've got to talk this out . . . but not now. Somewhere there must be a road out of the bog in which we're lost. I'm going to find it. Let's know just where we stand. When may I come?"

His voice was rough with feeling. He dared not

look long at her whose sweetness drew him so mightily.

"To-morrow, then. After dinner, say."

"I'll be here."

He turned away abruptly and left her.

CHAPTER VI

When he came down to breakfast next morning Hilary found one of Antoinette's characteristic scrawls waiting for him.

"DEAR BIG BROWN MAN: Will it bore you to death if I bring a friend to luncheon with me? I've just had a wire *en route* to say he's running out from Chicago. I'll give you the worst at the start. Name of Rosenbloom and in the theatrical line. But he's a very decent sort, just the same. Now, old boy, I'm not going to inflict him on you much, so you needn't sniff. He'll be here for a day or two, but Dick and I will look out for him.

"TOINETTE.

"P. S.—He's the great Rosenbloom, mind you, the one that made the big hit with 'Eve, Adam and the Apple.' "

Hilary smiled. Toinette had friends by the score, and more than one of them would have thought nothing of a run across four states to see her. It

spoke well for his fiancée, even if she did make quite a splash of color in a drab landscape, that her big heart endeared her to all who knew her.

Gordon found the great Rosenbloom with Antoinette on one of the big porches of the Brentford Arms. He was a round, neat little man with black beady eyes that never were in repose. His gestures, his voice, the tense alertness of him oozed energy. There was in his face the confidence of the fighting male who has won out in the great American game of money making. Since he had somehow expected to see a large loud man in a fancy vest, all garnished with flashing diamonds, Gordon was agreeably surprised.

The conversation drifted to theatrical channels. Rosenbloom knew all the stars of the dramatic firmament and he talked entertainingly of them and their foibles. Toinette kept him going, occasionally flashing a sidelong look at Hilary from her long oval eyes to see how he was taking it. Clearly she wanted her friend to make a good impression on the Westerner.

"All temperament, Mr. Hilary . . . delight-

ful people, but no sense of business values. You never can tell when a star is going to upset your apple cart with some nonsense or other. Sometimes it's professional jealousy in the company, or else it's swelled head. We go to all the expense of putting a thing on; then if it fails we're to blame, and if it succeeds the star and the author are both quite sure they did it."

"Human nature," suggested the government engineer.

"Quite so. . . . But delightful people, just the same, all temperament and impulse. A case in point occurs to me. It was at a supper in London to celebrate an Irving-Terry success. Some discussion came up between the two stars. Don't remember what. About how some line ought to be given and the business that went with it. Irving had one view . . . Terry another. For about three minutes they had it hot and heavy. Good-natured, y'understand, but on the edge of sharpness. Sir Henry sticks to his opinion. Ellen jumps up from the table and acts it, right there in the restaurant, the way she thinks it should be done. Irving explains

why she is wrong. Terry stands there lost in thought half a minute, nods her head, and runs round behind her friend. 'You're right, Henry,' she tells him, and kisses him before us all to show there's no hard feeling. All as natural and innocent as if it had been a child and her mother."

Dick Lambert presently drove up in his car. The four ate lunch together, during which Dick and Toinette arranged a run to Creston for the afternoon.

"We'll stay for the polo game, have dinner at the Country Club, and come back in the cool of the evening. What!"

"You're on, Dick," Mrs. Bock assented, with a vigorous nod, the while she prepared her salad.

"Afraid you can't count me in. I've got some work I want to do," Gordon explained.

"Bother your old work. Of course you'll go," Toinette insisted.

"Can't. Sorry." Hilary's disarming smile made offense impossible.

"Don't be a spoil-sport, Gordon. You can do your work to-night."

"Don't see how I can. Take some one in my place."

"Miss Dixon might go," Dick said quickly.

"Oh, all right," Antoinette pouted. "But I thought you'd want to go, Gordon."

"Of course I'd like to go, but you see I can't. Anyhow, Miss Dixon is worth a dozen of me."

Inside of five minutes Lambert had found Miss Dixon and brought her into conference. She was a trim dark young woman with a manner of sweet innocence that appealed dexterously to every man she met.

"I don't like to keep you-all out of the drive, Mr. Hilary," she drawled, with a melting look out of her long oval eyes.

Hilary had caught the quick glance that flashed between her and Lambert. It occurred to him that Dick was not impervious to the Delilah-like allurement of this sinuous young woman.

After they had gone Hilary dictated a few letters to the public stenographer at the hotel, smoked, tried to read a magazine, and finally accepted an invita-

tion for a round of golf on the Brentford Arms links.

These makeshifts carried him into the late afternoon. A plunge in the pool, with half an hour of lazy swimming, brought him to the time of the opening of the dining room. Hilary was the first in and the first out. Before the dusk had deepened to darkness he was on his way to the cañon.

A slant of rain beat on him while he was still plodding up the road between the alfalfa fields, but by the time he reached the hill of pines where she lived the passing shower no longer eclipsed a starry sky.

Radiant as Hebe she came out of the dusk to meet him, moving as if each buoyant step was a delight to her. But in spite of her gladness she held herself with a proud, shy dignity.

Their fingers touched, no more, but the fire leaped in her lover's arteries.

"You came, then," was all she said.

"Was it likely I wouldn't?"

"The grass is wet. Will you come in?"

Hilary fell into step and walked with her across

the moon-dappled turf. His hungry eyes fed on the delicate curve of her nostril and the spirited lines of the pure classic face. He thought that when she walked the exquisite grace of her motion had all the rhythm of perfect music.

A reading-lamp on the table gave to the room a shadowed light. Daphne closed the door and with a gesture motioned her guest to a chair on the left of the empty fireplace. She seated herself on the other side, a little back from the circle of the lamp's rays. It seemed to him that there was purpose in her movements, as if she had made up her mind to take charge of a situation that might easily get away from her. A little hurried, a little fearful, she was yet resolute in spite of her trepidation.

"I . . . have something to tell you," she began uncertainly. "At first I did not mean to speak of it. I thought we were . . . like ships that pass in the night. But we come back to each other. We . . . come back. It is necessary you should know . . . about me."

"Only what you want to tell me. You are

Daphne, the woman I love. That is all I need to know."

"No, that is not all. There is something else. I am . . . married."

Her words tied a stone to Hilary's heart. There had been moments when he had guessed it, but there had been others—flashes of violet and gold in a world reborn—when the invincible innocence of a maid had haloed her young head.

He could only repeat her "Married" in a whisper.

A sense of disaster swept Hilary, but, oddly enough, little details of her person obtruded on his attention. In the extreme pallor of her face the lips stood out brilliant as hothouse poppies. Her hair was dressed in a new way. It was coiled at the nape of her neck, and as she leaned forward with her chin in the cup of her hand it fell under the glow of the lamp and rippled like molten waves of copper.

"Tell me," he said gently.

His tenderness brought a rush of tears to her eyes. She looked straight before her into the fireplace, but he could see from the profile that her lip

was tremulous. When she spoke it was in the least of voices.

"I was so young—not yet twenty—and I had been an orphan many years. My father left me a great deal of money. After I finished school and came to Red Holm—that is the name of my Brentford place—a distant relative of my mother joined me as a chaperone. She had been delicate for a great many years, so we lived quietly. She was like a second mother to me, and loved me as a daughter. I did not meet many people. . . . Her son spent the summer with us after he was graduated from college."

Still she did not look at Hilary. He had eyes for nothing but her.

"He was good looking and light hearted. I suppose we had been living a drab life. He livened us. His mother bloomed, and I liked him for making her happier. . . . He made love to me. I know now that I never loved him, but I didn't know it then. His mother was anxious to see us married. I was, and am, very fond of her. . . . We became engaged."

Her words died away. A wave of great sympathy for her swept over Hilary.

"Yes," he said hoarsely.

"It was to be a short engagement. I wrote to a cousin of mine in Europe who was studying medicine abroad. In my letter I told him we would be married in six weeks. . . . . But Aimée, my chaperone, had another heart attack. It was very severe, and she worried for fear she might pass away before we were settled. We changed our plans and were married at once. My cousin reached Brentford just five minutes after the minister had called us man and wife."

Hilary's pulse flew fast. He divined that somehow this cousin had set the spark to the tragedy which engulfed her.

"After getting my letter Ned, my cousin, had sailed from Hamburg on the first boat. He did not cable because he thought he had a month. His boat was delayed a few hours to assist another liner that was in trouble. The train on which he came from New York lost an hour on account of a hot box. If he had wired we would have waited for

him. But, of course, he did not know the wedding had been advanced, and there were reasons why he did not want to let me know he was on the way. . . . So he got here too late. My happiness was dependent on a lot of trivial chances, all of which went against me."

Hilary rose, walked round the table, and stood behind her chair. He put an arm on either side of her neck, caught her little hands in his strong ones, and held them tight. She choked, nodded her thanks for his unspoken sympathy, and presently sent him back to his seat.

"In the hubbub at Ned's arrival he found a chance to ask me to see him alone at once. We had always been close friends. I saw immediately it was something serious. I whispered that I would be in the upstairs library some time before we left the house. My chance came when I ran up to change my dress for the journey. I found Ned waiting in the library."

Hilary sat very still, tense with anxiety.

She leaned her face on her hand, so that her eyes were hidden from him. Her shamed head sank

lower. The red lips were parched and she moistened them with the tip of her tongue. When she spoke the words came as if they had been wrung from her by torture.

"He told me . . . Ned did . . . that . . . there were . . . reasons . . . why I couldn't be . . . a wife . . . to the man I had married."

"He was already married," Hilary suggested, and knew even as he spoke that it was a wrong guess.

Her eyes were still hidden behind the trembling hand. "No." And almost in a whisper: "Worse than that."

Gordon found a difficulty in speaking, but he knew his shrinking was nothing as compared with hers. "There was . . . another woman?"

"There have always been other women, but——" Her hand went out with a hopeless little gesture. "Oh, I can't explain."

"Consequences?" he hazarded.

She nodded assent.

"A child?"

"No."

Hilary tried again. "Before your cousin went to Europe he had been a practicing physician?"

"Yes." Her lips were parched, her voice almost inaudible.

"He had been consulted as a doctor by the man you had married?"

"Yes."

The muscles in the man's cheeks stood out like ropes of steel. At that moment he would gladly have done murder because of the wrong done to this girl. Her pitiful story had gone straight to his heart.

"Your cousin told you that your husband was a moral leper?"

Again, "Yes."

The man from Arizona knew it was better not to stop at half truths now. She had gone so deep into the tragedy of life, had for so long locked her secret from even her closest friends, that after the first shock of it plain speech would be a relief.

"And that his sins had come home to him . . . physically?"

The head behind her open palm moved down and up.

Hilary drew a deep ragged breath. His eyes were like live coals. The savage and primitive impulse of Cain drummed through his veins.

"What did your cousin tell you to do?"

"To make an end of it—not to go any farther."

"Of course. That was the only thing to do."

"He wanted to call in the man I had married and confront him with the facts. His idea was that I must get an annulment or a divorce as soon as I could."

"Good . . . and you did?"

"No."

His muscular fingers gripped the arms of his chair till they were bloodless. "God! You don't mean . . . "

For the first time since she had begun her story she looked at him. "There was his mother, my friend. I couldn't have done that without killing her."

"But——"

"We sent for . . . my husband. He was fright-

ened, partly for fear he was going to lose my money after all. We made terms."

"A voluntary separation?"

"No. We had to think of Aimée, the innocent mother who adored him. It was almost certain that any blow now would be fatal. We went on our wedding journey as if nothing had happened. But . . . we changed the arrangements." Her eyes fell away from his and were concealed behind the screen of her hand.

To think of that journey made his blood boil. An innocent girl, thrown into constant contact with a roué from whom her whole soul shrank, forced into the necessary minor intimacies of travel, hiding always from the world the horror of him she must have felt. He conceived her at night, locked at last securely in her own room, the mask off now that there were none to see, sobbing herself to sleep in the small hours. It was an ordeal no girl should have been forced to endure.

"But you separated later?"

"Not officially. We kept up appearances. Even Aimée does not know the truth. He is not at Red

Holm much. When he is there I am usually here. Sometimes I help him entertain his friends. But we are less than nothing to each other."

"And you mean to go through life with this millstone round your neck?"

"As long as Aimée lives."

"Why, the thing is monstrous." His throat ached tensely. He rose to his feet and paced up and down the room. "You have to live your own life. You can't let your whole being become stunted to spare the illusions of a friend."

"But her illusion means life to her. She loves him with her whole soul. Take away her trust in him and she has nothing left."

"So you bolster up a lie and think good can come of it. You're wrong, Daphne."

"In theory, yes; but concretely, I'm right. Whenever I think of Aimée I know it."

"Think of yourself, of all that life might mean to you." He stopped in his stride and put his hands on her shoulders. "Life is laid on us as a duty. We can't refuse it. We've got to do our work or be debtors to the world."

"And I'm not doing mine, you think?"

"Are you?"

"You mean . . . children?" He could just catch the low words.

"I mean the development of your whole being. Children, if children come . . . and love, when it comes."

"It has come."

Her noble simplicity moved him greatly. An emotion tender and lofty went out to her from the depth of his heart. His fingers caressed lightly the ripples of her glorious hair. Moments such as this are fleeting ones, but he would not lay violent hands upon it to drive away its joy.

She, too, felt the note of exquisite happiness. It came to her with rapture that all our finer activities must lead to love. Turning in the big chair, she lifted to him a face softly glowing, eyes suffused with the emotion swelling in her.

His arm went round her shoulder and their lips met.

"Gordon," she whispered, "it's like Charlotte

Brontë says: 'You fit me into the finest fibre of my being.' "

"Don't I know, dear? Isn't my love for you the best thing about me? Love is waiting to enlarge the horizons of our lives . . . if we'll let it. Surely you haven't the right to dwarf your nature out of pity for anyone."

"And I'm doing it all the time," she murmured.

"If you are it is treason. A marriage that cramps instead of expanding is false. You know that."

"Yes, but . . . Aimée."

"Why must she stand in your way? Something is wrong. You haven't solved your problem correctly."

"All I can do is to beat against the bars. There's no way out."

He lifted her from the chair and drew her into his arms. It was an embrace of tender love, and not of passion. Her tired eyes, weary with the sorrow of many dead yesterdays, rested in the strength of his masterful gaze.

"There's a way out, Daphne. And we're going to find it. Perhaps it may not bring us together,

but it will give you freedom to find yourself. Often a woman's mistake spells ruin for her, but you have escaped the worst. Thank heaven, it's only the letter of the law that binds you."

"And my conscience," she added with her troubled smile.

"We often mistake our fears for conscience. . . . If I'm to help you I want to set about it intelligently. Let me meet your friend Aimée . . . and her son, if he is here now."

"Will you come to Red Holm if I ask you?"

"Yes."

"Then I'll arrange it."

"But he doesn't know we've met."

"That doesn't matter. He goes his way; I go mine. He never interferes with anything I want to do." An ironic smile rested for a moment on the spirited intelligent face. "He would be afraid I might stop his allowance. It's the one hold I have on him. I intended after we were married to make a settlement on him. But I changed my mind after . . . after my talk with Ned. It didn't seem wise to make him independent."

"I can see it wouldn't."

Under each of her dusky eyes a flush burned. "It's humiliating to treat him so . . . much more to me than to him. But I've found out he always gets into trouble when he has much money."

"Trouble with . . . women?"

"Always. He couldn't live without an affair of some sort. He has to follow every woman that smiles at him. There is not the least hope for him."

She mentioned it without resentment, merely as a matter of fact.

"It is atrocious that you should be sacrificed for a fellow of that sort."

"But it isn't for him . . . What's that?"

Hilary straightened. "Sounds like wheels. . . . It's a rig of some sort. What can it be doing here?"

"I know. . . . It must be Flanders, one of my men at Red Holm. He is bringing me some supplies. You must go . . . at once."

"I'll hear from you?" he asked quickly.

"Yes. Within a day or two. . . . Now go, dear.

They moved together out of the house and into the grove. From back of the cottage could be heard the crunch of the wheels.

Their lips touched, and Hilary was gone.

Before Flanders rounded into view Daphne was back in the house.

Quite calmly she superintended the unloading of supplies and gave him directions about filling other needs. But as soon as he was gone she locked the door, undressed swiftly, and got into a loose dressing gown. Her hair she freed, so that it fell about her shoulders far below her waist in burnished waves of bronze. She wanted to think things out for herself, and because her thoughts were to be untrammeled she released her body from the restraints of dress that conventions have decreed.

In her girlhood days marriage had meant to Daphne romance. As Nature thrust her remorselessly toward maturity vague suggestions about its meaning, about the relations of men and women to each other and the reasons for them, had flitted now and again into her mind and been expelled as immodest. Sometimes she had let them dwell with

her as guests of doubtful character, interesting but sinful, and afterwards she had purged her soul humbly and contritely. She had taken it for granted that because these subjects were taboo in society any consideration of them must show indelicacy of moral fiber.

But with her own marriage—which had made her a wife and left her still a maid—the doors had been thrown open on many forbidden subjects. She had discovered that much which shocks us is not wrong, and that a great deal is wrong which does not shock because of its familiarity. From books and from talks with other women she had found out that in many cases marriage is only legalized prostitution. The husband provides a home and the comforts that go with it. The wife breeds his children and serves him in lieu of a mistress.

Daphne felt that this was all wrong, that children born of such a marriage come into the world defrauded of a home in which they are nourished by the happiness of their parents. To be brave of soul and free of spirit a child must be conceived and reared in love.

As she emerged into wider horizons Daphne saw that a change is being worked out in the institution of marriage. The whole antique theory of ownership of a wife is falling to pieces. A new system of sex morality—one only as yet vaguely formulated—is beginning to rise out of the ashes of the old rigid one. According to it marriage confers on a man no *right* to the body of a woman. She must come to him voluntarily if at all, only because she loves him.

With this new order is involved, Daphne saw, the economic independence of woman. Until that is granted nothing else is possible. It must be recognized fundamentally that Motherhood ought not to be the haphazard effect of an indulgence given a man by a woman, but is a public service of the highest character.

The unwritten law that women shall not become mothers unless they are married is under the present organization of society founded on economic necessity. But deep down in her heart Daphne believed it to be basically wrong. To be sure, most women cannot violate it without making their children pay

the penalty, a price too great to ask of the innocent little ones. Yet the great problem of the race —and its great opportunity—is to produce a new generation better than the parents physically, mentally and morally.

How can this be done when the resources of human life are wasted so prodigally? Thousands and tens of thousands of strong, deep-breasted women, splendidly endowed to be the mothers of the nation, are spending their lives in barrenness because they have not been asked in marriage or because they will not accept as the father of their unborn children a second or third-rate man. Daphne had a deep conviction that this was all wrong. In the Divine plan of the universe, as she understood it, there were no sterile women. To her the last word of a woman's life is Motherhood. If she missed that she would miss all; would lose the very crown and glory of her being.

Daphne's wasted womanhood went out in passionate protest against the cruel fate which bound her to sterility. It was, after all, only a convention of society that kept her childless. There was

another law—deeper than any man-made one, as profound as her own nature—which urged her to become a mother. It was her right—her God-given right. Nay, it was more than a right; a duty. If she were to fulfill her mission on earth it must be by making herself fruitful. She was strong, a perfect woman physically, with a sound, vigorous constitution well endowed for maternity. Was it right to obey the man-made law which forced barrenness upon her? Was it not a higher duty to follow the law of Nature within her, the law that bade her recreate and carry on the race? From generation to generation her ancestors had carried forward the flame of life. If one of them had failed she would never have come into being. The great object of marriage was to bear forward the torch of life into the future.

She was sure that conformity to the unthinking verdict of society is not in itself a virtue. People are frightened by the new, regardless of its ethical value. Daphne saw no reason why she should be cheated out of life by the shallow dogmas of a fettered society. It was not too late. She was still

young. Why not give herself to the noble task for which Nature had designed her through countless ages of growths?

Her long, supple body relaxed on the lounge, her head buried in sofa cushions, Daphne suffered the torments of lost and wasted womanhood. Surely it was her right to make of her life all she could, not to go on spending her strength simply on herself. Motherhood would be a joy. It would be heaven. In imagination she felt the ecstasy of little fingers straying over her face, clutching at her veined breasts. She saw their little bodies, plump and nude, as she bathed them. Passionately she longed to fulfill her function—to be a mother, and so justify her existence.

Before she met Gordon it had been different. Then she had known only vague longings. Now they had become poignant. For out of a world of men had come seeking her the one above all she would choose as a lover and for the father of her children. He summed up in his person the qualities she hoped for them—a strong physique, an untrammeled mind, a true sense of honor, the

instincts of a gentleman, and the democracy of a worker.

The excitement kindled in her raced through her from head to foot. Her eyes shone like diamonds. Why not? Why not? She was not hampered as most women are by economic conditions. In the sight of the law she was a married woman, free to use the powers of her sex to enhance the value of her life and recreate it. Why not bear children? Why not choose as their father the man she loved, the pick of all she had ever met, the mate Destiny had sent her?

Must she be a traitor to love, to her nature, to her unborn children, to the duty of her life, because a shallow world had pronounced its "Thou shalt not"?

Daphne, in the grip of a great idea, was swept to her feet, into a long cloak, and out into the open night. A house was too small for her; a roof shut out the vision of the wide horizons she craved. She wanted to be alone with herself, where she could listen to the still voice of a world which is forever recreating itself.

With the staghound David padding loyally beside her, she pushed up the mountain side toward the velvet vault above, from which a million worlds looked down.

CHAPTER VII

Hilary, too, was in the grip of a passionate emotion. His throat ached for this creature of fire and dew whose chains had dragged her through the filthy mud of forbidden knowledge. All the chivalry of his nature was in arms against the dry rot of a civilization that could so entangle innocence in its conventions. It was wrong to the core. There was, he felt, something malignant about a state of society which was smugly satisfied to produce such effects.

Daphne was made for the fine things of life. He had seen how even a poor vicarious sort of motherhood—the joy of children loaned her for an hour—had warmed and quickened her to a divine maternity. He had felt, too, the current of love in her heart as its glow had melted the ice of years of restraint. Her soul had come to meet his with the

proud humility of surrender that only good women know. In the fires of her pure passion no dross could survive. If their bodies ever met it would be with her a spiritual rite. From that moment they would live in her thought as one flesh and one soul fused together for all time, come weal or woe.

Moved deeply as he was, Hilary had no mind to meet the casual gossip and light laughter of the hotel guests whom he knew. Quickly he passed to his room, threw open the window, and let the soft breath of the night play on him as he yielded to his dreams. How long he sat there Gordon did not know. The whisper of voices from below brought a smile to his grave eyes. For the note of lovers escaping to solitude was in the murmur of that breathless laughter.

He did not stir, even though they stopped among the lilac bushes so close that he could have dropped a pebble on them. There was no curiosity in his mind; rather a sympathy catholic enough to embrace all lovers. He did not look down, for he felt that as soon as he recognized them his presence would be an intrusion.

"I thought we'd never get away from them. Dame Lennox with her 'Let's have a game of bridge' is a frightful bore. What!"

The voice was of a melodious tenor. It rang a chord in Hilary's memory, though he could not at once place its owner.

"Is she?" The tone suggested a demure archness. The man above could guess that a swift slant of soft eyes had accompanied the words.

"A beastly bore, especially when I'm on fire to see you alone."

"But you know you oughtn't to be, bad boy."

"Why shouldn't I? It's all in the game. I play off my own bat and ask no questions about how she passes her time."

No explanation of who "she" was appeared necessary.

"And does she ask none about what you do with yours?"

"No."

Without looking, Hilary knew that she was in her lover's arms. Their fragmentary talk was strewn from time to time with kisses.

"I don't want to come between you," she purred in her sweet Southern drawl.

The man laughed, not pleasantly. "Don't worry about that. You're not coming between us."

"You mean . . . ?"

"Never mind what I mean . . . except that I love you."

"If I thought I was coming between you I wouldn't let you . . . make love to me. You oughtn't to, boy. It isn't right of you . . . We'll say good-by and you'll go away."

To Hilary the words were not convincing. His eyes for the first time fell upon the actors in the little drama. Her arms were about his neck, her red lips close to his, her heavy-lidded eyes half shut in the back-thrown head. She was languorous as the soft air of a summer night. He sensed Delilah in her lithe and lascivious abandon. Her words might plead for virtue, but all the sensuous appeal of her laughed down the wind as a mockery to her protestations.

Hilary rose quietly and moved from the window. This was none of his business. Moreover, it stirred

in him a vague resentment. This, too, was an illicit love affair. In the eyes of the world it would be no different from his own with Daphne. But Gordon knew that all the distance of the poles separated this woman from the one he loved. She had used almost the very words of Daphne, but she had conveyed an impression directly opposite. Her intention clearly was to free herself of responsibility, while at the same time drawing on her lover. She was playing the game of sex with all the coquetry of a siren.

The murmur of their voices floated indistinctly to the room above and at last died away. Gordon returned to his chair by the window and to the dreams that summoned him. It must have been half an hour later that the figures of the lovers emerged from the haze of the garden and stopped again among the lilacs.

Words and snatches of phrases floated up to Hilary.

". . . mean it? . . . really want us to come?"

The man's voice answered. ". . . It's to be a

house party." Hilary lost the next, but thought he caught his own name and that of Toinette.

"If I go will you . . . behave?"

"Oh, I'll behave. No one will guess it."

He interrupted his low triumphant laugh to kiss her.

"You're sure. I won't go unless . . ."

Their talk fell to a lower note. Only one question and one answer reached the involuntary listener.

"You don't think she suspects anything?"

"Of course she doesn't. How can she? And, anyhow, she wouldn't care," the man reassured.

Some shift in their position as they sauntered forward brought their faces into the light. The man was Dick Lambert and the woman Miss Jimmie Dixon. The head turned to Hilary in the moonlight was an attractive one, demure but piquant. After its own fashion the face was very pretty. Even the pouting lips had their charm. But the eyes were the strongest feature. These mocked and tantalized and allured. They were dark and liquid, with something of the long Oriental slant. In them

learned the world-old sophistication that keeps the most expert of woman-stalkers in poignant doubt about his conquest. She moved with a rhythmic sway, and the tight gown she wore showed the voluptuousness of the rounded lines. Once more Hilary thought of Delilah. She had all the fascination of the unknown, all the bitter sweetness of unfathomable woman in her shadowy smile. The eternal Mona Lisa gleamed from the olive countenance and haunted man with its uncertain meaning. Her lithe, graceful figure might have belonged to a reincarnated Egyptian slave, one who had danced before the king in nothing but spangled gauze and anklets, flashing sultry glances at the nobles when her royal lover was not looking.

They strolled into the dusk and disappeared. For a few moments the murmur of their voices came less and less distinctly.

Half an hour later Hilary met Miss Dixon on the stairway. She bowed to him, giving him the benefit of the little flutter of the eyelids, the demure and innocent appeal of a shy intimate glance, that is the most potent weapon of the woman who preys.

He had been going down to the hotel rotunda for a cigar. On his return he passed her rooms on his way to the one he occupied. Low and clear there came to him a snatch of song, insolent and mocking. His imagination conceived it a triumphant pæan of victory over another conquest.

He had scarcely lit his cigar before the bell of his telephone rang. Antoinette was at the other end of the line.

"That you, big brown man? . . . Yes, Toinette. Listen. We're invited to a house party next week at Mrs. Lambert's. Shall I say that you'll come?"

"And who is Mrs. Lambert?" he wanted to know.

"Why, Dickie's wife, of course. She wants to meet his friends. Now don't say you can't go. Of course you can. We'll have a perfectly booful time. Red Holm is one of the show places of this part of the country, and Mrs. Lambert is your kind of a woman. She's a thoroughbred, and a beauty on top of that. Awfully pleasant they say, but a highbrow. Reads serious books, you know—that sort of thing. You've just got to go, Gordon. Dickie insists on

you because you'll be congenial to Mrs. Lambert. You and she will get along like a house afire, he promises."

"I'll be glad to come," Hilary told her promptly.

He hung up the receiver as soon as he decently could. The blood drummed at his temples. His breath came panting through the nostrils. So Lambert was the man who had played havoc with Daphne's life. His strong brown fingers were nervous with their eagerness to get at the man's throat. He would have given all he had in the world for ten minutes with the fellow alone on the mountainside.

It was impossible to sit still. He paced the room diagonally in long strides. He sat down to write a note to Daphne and tore the sheet in two before he had well started. Passionately he longed to tramp out to her mountain home even though he could only look at the light which showed through the window. Another impulse took him as far as the corridor on a search for her husband, but died out in time to send him back to his room with hands clenched and knotted in his coat pockets. He felt

as if he must do something at once. In the end he worked off his excitement in a long tramp that took him many miles along the road that led in an opposite direction to the one going to the mountains. Early in the morning he came back to Brentford tired but easier in mind. He was again master of himself and his impulses.

CHAPTER VIII

The car swung from the high road into a long avenue of elms which swept like a crescent to the house. Even though he had been prepared Gordon was surprised at the size of the place. It was well kept, too—avenue, lawn, stables, so far as he could tell at a glance, all in apple-pie order. Somebody was master here who knew how to get things done, and it was a four to one shot that the somebody was not Mr. Richard Lambert, who, by the way, came lounging out in a house jacket, cigarette in hand, to bid them welcome.

Coming as they did out of the strong afternoon sunshine, the hall was dim as an English cathedral to their blinking eyes. Daphne was moving down the big stairway to meet her guests, and on that stage set to lowered lights looked as if she were stepping straight out of a Corot. Her slender buoyant figure was draped in some filmy stuff of a helio-

trope shade that flowed about her diaphanously. Whether her gown was fashionable or not Hilary neither knew nor cared. Though it enhanced the values of her pale loveliness, her dress seemed merely an extension of her personality, harmonious as the shadows on a hillside in a summer landscape.

She met them with the manner of a perfect hostess, serene and surely poised but quite simply glad that they had come. Each of her guests felt an individual accent to the welcome she gave. It chanced that Hilary was introduced last. When their glances met he had the sensation of light streaming from her soul to his. But the fingers which touched his were cool as orthodox virtue.

It did not take her guests long to discover who was the guiding spirit at Red Holm. Lambert did as he pleased, gave orders here and there, changed details as it suited him; but inside and outside the house the servants looked to Daphne as the responsible head of the establishment. She managed the estate personally. The farming, stockraising, building, housekeeping were all supervised by her. She kept the accounts and signed the checks. Her hus-

band never lifted a hand to help. In the early days of their marriage he had attempted to take control of the reins. There had been a short sharp tussle, and he had retired defeated. Now he was merely a guest with special privileges.

After dinner they played auction bridge, but before they scattered for the night Daphne handed over to her guests the keys of the city. Each one was to do as he or she pleased. There were fishing and hunting for any who liked sport, and there was a pretty good rough golf links behind the paddock. Those who preferred to motor might do so. Horses were in the stables that needed exercise. Just back of the tennis court they would find a swimming pool. Or if they wanted just to be lazy and read she hoped they would feel free of the house. They would meet at dinner, of course, no matter how they might be separated during the day.

Hilary had just one moment alone with her. It was while the rest were discussing animatedly what they would do to-morrow.

"I'm so glad you came," she told him simply.

They were facing each other above one of the

card tables. Her soft cheeks had a shell-pink glow. He thought her dewy eyes like pools shot with moonlit radiance.

"And I would rather be here than any place in heaven or earth," he answered as simply.

"What about a picnic at Lovers' Leap, Daphne?" Lambert called across.

"It would be delightful. But I'll be too busy to go in the morning. If you'll take the car I'll run out in the runabout and join you in time for luncheon."

They merged into one group and discussed details. It was decided that Dick would drive out after breakfast with Miss Dixon, Mrs. Bock, and Rosenbloom, and that Daphne would bring Hilary in the two-passenger car.

Hilary, fresh from Arizona where the sun rises at four, was up with the lark for an early morning swim. He ran across a gardener, who showed him where the pool was and where the bathing suits were kept. Five minutes later the Westerner stepped from a dressing room toward the springboard. His arms went skyward to a point. Straight as an

arrow he shot into the cool water at an acute angle.

He came up, shook his head, swam with strong overhand strokes to the side of the pool, and dragged himself to land. Along the edge he ran to the springboard—and stopped abruptly just as he was set for another dive.

A young woman in a silk bathing suit was coming out of one of the dressing rooms toward him. It was Daphne, hardly yet escaped fully from sleep, adorable in the flushed rosiness of her awakening. Stripped of the adventitious aids of dress she held her own easily. With a light step and perfect balance she came to meet him. Not Eve in the garden before she ate of knowledge was more innocently unconscious, more empty of prudery and false modesty. From the little bare feet and shapely ankles, above which rose the firm beautifully modeled legs, to the burnished hair in exquisite disarray, every line stood the test of this simple garb. She was lovely Spring, but Spring deepening softly into Summer. The gaucherie and sharpness of girlhood were gone, its warm charm remained. The ripeness

of maturity had not yet rounded her fully, but all its lovely promise was hers.

Hilary knew a quickened pulse. "You here, Daphne!"

She met his look without shame. "I heard you pass . . . and guessed where you were coming. My bathing suit was in my room. I dressed. So I needed only to throw off my cloak when I got here."

He vowed in his deepest heart that she was the bravest, the most splendid woman under heaven. Who else among them would have avowed so frankly, so cleanly, the reason of her coming? His eyes, veiled for a moment with emotion, were lost a fathom deep in hers.

"Come," he bade her in a low voice, uneven with feeling.

They stood side by side, the straight slender woman and the long brown man with the rippling muscles. Together their hands went up, their bodies leaned forward and shot through the air, and together they cut the water.

She reached the surface first, laughed a challenge

across at him, and with strong and supple limbs went forward through the waves their dive had stirred. He plunged in pursuit, caught up with her, and swam on his side so that he could watch her as she moved.

"You swim well," he praised.

"And you better," she flashed back.

"Do you mind?"

"Mind! I should hate you if you couldn't beat me at all physical exercises."

"I've never played golf much."

"You'll be my master at it inside of a week," she promised generously.

"If you'll be my teacher."

"I will."

"Do I get my first lesson this morning?"

She considered, holding him in suspense with a dimpling smile. "But I'm staying at home to catch up my accounts. They're behind."

"I'll help you with them."

She caught at the railing and drew herself dripping up the stairway. A moment later he dripped beside her.

"It's a bargain, sir."

She padded with wet feet along the cement ledge, took a little run, and was off again. He watched her slim body disappear and gave sharp chase. But she had a long start and she went through the water swift and graceful as a naiad. Given another twenty yards and he would have caught her, but now he was just too late. Out of the water before he could reach her, she raced for the springboard, flung a gesture of farewell at him, and dived again.

Hilary reached the bank only to plunge once more. He used the Australian crawl because it took him along faster, and before they were half-way down the pool he was beside her.

She laughed with delight, and the sound of his joy pealed out with hers. Both of them were exuberantly happy. Had it been dark he would have caught his water nymph to him. But it was not necessary. Their ardent eyes kissed, though not so much as a finger of their bodies touched each other. Once a tendril of her hair floated across his eyes and clung damply to his cheek. It was fine as silk, like gold spun in the looms of an Athenian goddess.

"It's a good world. No bars can keep us prisoner to-day," he told her.

"No, not to-day. We'll love everything that's alive because we're young and together."

His heart jumped with a glad pulse. "It's the greatest word in the language—together."

"Except one," she corrected happily, and her soft eyes enveloped him in a look that spelled the word she meant.

"They mean the same thing to me."

"And to me," she added breathlessly.

They had reached a second time the end of the pool.

"I must go," the girl said.

"Just one more plunge . . . together."

That last word, and the irresistible smile with which he flung it at her, won the point. They dived again, circling the pool slowly.

"I love you, Daphne. I thank God for you every hour."

"And I for you, dear man," she murmured.

"We'll find a way to cheat that great big lie we call society. It's preposterous to think we can't. I'm invincibly strong."

"Your strength is as the strength of ten, because——" she quoted at him.

"And you . . . you pale slim golden girl . . . you're like steel. We're bound to win."

She walked up the steps and stood at the head of them, running rivulets.

"I'll see you at breakfast."

"And then over the accounts."

"And again to teach you golf," she laughed.

"And once more in your car on the way to the picnic." He nodded a smiling face at her confidentially. "It's to be our day, the first of ever so many."

"Oh, Gordon, do you think so? We mustn't be too happy because . . . we mayn't be able to break the bars after all."

"I'll never believe it."

"You forgot Aimée."

"We'll find a way."

"And . . . the other woman."

The confidence went out of him like the gas from a rent balloon. Antoinette stood squarely in the way of their happiness. He was bound to her as

surely as if the clergyman had spoken the words that made them man and wife. He had nothing to say.

She smiled a faint little wistful smile. "So you see the bars of your cage would keep us apart even if I could get through those of mine."

"Yes," he admitted. Then: "Losers must have leave to speak," he quoted grimly. "Let me tell you my story . . . on the golf links. After you have heard it you may not care for me any more. Anyhow, I'm going to play fair. I want you to know me as I am . . . or as I have been."

The sun had come up and was striking glints of copper from her mop of hair. Into her cheeks crept an apple-blossom color as she stood there in her wet clinging suit, the lank grace of a forest deer in her attitude.

"You can't make me believe you're not . . . good." She got the last word out with a drop of the voice, shy eyes ready to fly from his.

"Doesn't that depend on how we define good? There's a difference between a good man and a good woman. He has fought and failed and fought again and won. A dozen times he has to go through

his fight. Sometimes he wins; sometimes he loses. Then he has to rise up from his defeat, shake himself free of it, and tramp on. A man is never bad till he loses the dynamic spark of self-respect. But a woman—ah, a good woman is of finer stuff. She has never known the failure of being dragged through mud. Her feet are on the ground, but her eyes are in the stars."

Her eyes mocked him lovingly. "Fiddlesticks, dear man! We're living in the twentieth century and not in the early nineteenth. It's no longer the fashion for women to be angels. They're just human beings, almost as human as you men."

"But——"

The apple blossoms went a deeper shade in her cheeks. "And, in the second place, we don't believe in double standards any longer. If a man does wrong in . . . in the way we mean . . . he can't claim immunity any more than a woman can."

"Then is he . . . forever condemned?" Beneath the tan he was pale, but his eyes rested in hers steadily.

Her head lifted proudly, so that the rounded column of her white throat showed above the wet silk clinging to her neck. "He must come to the woman he loves as clean of soul and body as she is. If he comes with apologies . . . or explanations . . . he is not her lover, a freeman and an equal, but a slave."

"Then how shall he come . . . with a lie on his lips and in his heart . . . or not at all?"

"Let him purge himself, as you have in your desert life. Let him make honorable reparation, as you are going to do, my friend. Then . . . he is clean again of hand and heart."

Her voice broke almost into a little cry of pain. For the knowledge had welled up in her that by her own decree she banished him from her.

Hilary bowed his head. "By God, I take off my hat to you for a noble and a great-hearted woman. So be it."

She turned, caught up her cloak from the dressing room, and walked lightly away, untrammeled of mind and of body. Something in her elastic gait, reinforcing the memory of her frank courage,

reminded him of stripling boy still trailing clouds of glory in his wake.

Her way was no easy one, but she would tread it with her head up and a smile on her face. Years ago he had served as a boy in the Spanish war, but he had seen no more gallant soldier than his little friend Daphne.

CHAPTER IX

It came to Hilary presently to wonder how Daphne knew so much of his affair with Antoinette as her words had implied. He guessed at Dick Lambert as the medium of information. It was probable that he had told her the story at the time the house party was being discussed between them. He was glad she knew, and on the whole glad she had heard it from a not too friendly source. Certainly if she had listened to her husband's version —with his characteristic curl of the lip and scornful shrug of shoulder—it would be impossible to idealize the situation. Anyhow, she had found out the worst and still trusted him. He was forgiven, and her pardon of him had come cheap enough since it had not cost him her love.

A smile of content lay deep in his eyes as he turned the shower on his well-packed shoulders and

drew the towel briskly round his muscular narrow-flanked body.

He still had time for a long walk before breakfast. Crossing the paddock, he struck the river below the bridge and followed it for half a mile, noting the holes and riffles where the big trout were likely to lie. He wished he had brought a rod. There were a dozen places where he would like to try a cast. A ginger quill or a willow fly would come pretty near to drawing a rise behind that big rock. Or perhaps a gray hackle now . . .

When Hilary reached the breakfast room it was still empty except for Daphne. He helped himself to bacon and eggs, declining grape fruit, and was helped by her to coffee.

"Breakfast's a pretty haphazard meal at Red Holm," she explained. "I'm usually down long before Dick. Aimée eats in her room."

Dick drifted in a quarter of an hour later, with an effect of exuberant good looks in the easy jauntiness of his manner.

"Oh, I say! Mornin', you early birds," he greeted them.

"Aren't you rather early yourself?" Daphne inquired.

"Got to be. We start in less than an hour. I suppose it's an odds on chance the others are still in their downys."

"They've been called. It's not really early. Mr. Hilary and I have had a swim, and since then I've done an hour's work and he has been down the river."

"Wish I had your energy." To Miss Dixon, who entered just then looking very trim and demure in a dove-colored motoring costume, he passed on the information. "I say, Miss Jimmie! What d'ye think? Hilary and my wife have been having an ante-dawn swim. How's that for strenuosity?"

Miss Dixon shot a look from her oval eyes that included both her hostess and Hilary. If there were no suspicion in that swift glance at least there was a readiness to suspect.

"Really? How romantic!"

Hilary laughed, with a faint amused annoyance. "Think so, Miss Dixon? Let's be romantic to-mor-

row morning, just you and I, at six a. m. Shall we?"

"No, thank you," returned the young sybarite promptly. "I'm too comfortable just at that hour to care for romance. But Antoinette might. Why don't you ask her, Mr. Hilary?"

Gordon had suspected Jimmie Dixon of being catty. Now he knew it. The claws were scratching, even though they were hidden in the velvet padding.

"Thanks for the suggestion. I shall," he retorted genially.

And he did, as soon as Mrs. Bock appeared. If Miss Dixon had expected Antoinette to be miffed at the news of the early swim she was disappointed. Hilary's fiancée was plainly pleased that Gordon was hitting it off with Mrs. Lambert.

"Good for you. I'd come with you myself tomorrow if I weren't too lazy. So would Jimmie. But there's no use in us promising. Neither one of us has the courage to leave a comfy bed at daybreak. So we'll just applaud you two that have."

Hilary was grateful. He had never liked An-

toinette's kind-hearted good sense better than he did just now. It would have been easy for her to have claimed proprietorship in such a way as to have made for a little embarrassment. Instead she had virtually told him to go in and have a good time.

The picnickers went off in the big car down the avenue while Gordon and Daphne waved them farewell. As soon as the automobile had turned the corner she proposed business.

"First, my accounts. Then, the golf lesson. Come."

He followed her down the hall, along a corridor, and into a room that had the look of affairs and yet the note of feminine occupancy. It was an office, but an office glorified by the taste of the tenant. There was a typewriter, index files, and a desk, in the pigeon-holes of which papers were neatly docketed and filed. But there were pictures on the wall; a Whistler for one, an Inness, showing a stretch of wind-swept trees, and two or three presented by artists that she knew. Books lined the walls; fiction, the poets, essays, and some technical works on

farming, stock and poultry raising, the care of animals, and such like. In one corner was a piano with its accompaniments. Plainly here was a room for business and yet one for pleasure, too, when the fancy willed it so.

Before he had been there ten minutes Hilary knew that she was a competent business woman. She had the overseer of the farms in. Her manner to him was friendly, brisk and to the point. The man plainly knew what he was about, and as plainly he thoroughly respected her judgment and knew his mistress. It did not take them a superfluous minute to get through the matters they discussed.

As soon as he was gone they plunged into the accounts, and here again she knew what she was doing. Every detail was at her fingers' ends. Gordon was willing to wager that no estate within a hundred miles was managed so systematically.

It was a part of her charm that she went from one thing to another with the enthusiasm of unsated youth. Hilary took his first lesson in golf from an instructor who for the moment at least found nothing else in the world important. It did not take

him long to get the hang of driving, but his approaches and his putts were likely to have too much steam behind them. His score was nothing to brag about, but he knew it would be a better one next time he went over the course.

As they trod the russet hills together the rhythm of her step vibrated through him. Surely no man ever had so incomparable a sweetheart as this golden-white beauty of ineffable grace.

At the last green he pointed a question at her. "You know the facts about . . . my engagement?"

The eyes in her clean-cut face did not shrink from his. "I think so . . . yes."

"It is only fair to say that . . . her husband was a brute . . . and . . . one thing more . . . that his charge against her was technically false."

Her eyes fell. Beneath them little patches of color burned.

"What do you mean by . . . technically false?"

"I mean that we had agreed to force him to ask

for a divorce. He was looking for some one upon whom to hang the blame. I gave him his chance . . . because I wanted her to be free so that I could marry her."

"You . . . loved her?" Daphne's voice was very low.

"I thought so then, but I was mistaken. For years I had lived in the hills far from women. I suppose I came home hungry for civilization. As for the one woman, who should be a comrade and a lover and a conscience to me, I had not yet found her. Perhaps I thought our paths would never cross. After all, most of us have to take second bests . . . so I took what I could get and lost my chance of the one great love."

She looked at him like a queen of heaven. There was in her face the purity of the dawn, in her eyes a divine reproach.

"My dear, I am yours . . . the soul of me. Have you lost me, just because . . . in the flesh I can't belong to you? Our souls are married. Nothing can come between us there. The body—it is no more than an expression of the spirit. I

love a hundred things about you, but they are only fragmentary hints of the real you."

"Yes. To a lover every motion of his mistress is adorable. The turn of her head, the lift of an eyebrow, the dimpling laugh: all of them delight him. And you're right. It is because they are to him symbols. But—he loves the symbols for themselves, too. We are poor creatures who walk with our feet in the dust. Unless we have the symbols we forget, and our eyes fall groundward."

"Yes," she sighed. "I know . . . I know. But . . . isn't that the great test of love, that it should be wholly of the spirit?"

"Yet if we were free——"

"Ah! If you were free! But you're not. I can't steal from another woman." She drew a deep ragged breath. "As soon as love is a theft it is befouled. No, you must go to her—and I . . . to my loneliness."

A long sob shook her body. She turned away and sank down on an iron-net bench, burying her face in her arm on its back.

Hilary was beside her in an instant, his hand on

her heaving shoulder. "Oh, my dear—my dear. Don't, Daphne! I can't stand it. Don't, dear!"

She did not lift her head, but her right hand groped for and found his left.

He spoke in a dry voice. "It's all my fault. I've been false to love. I might have known that some day, if I had the patience to wait, the one love of my life would come to me. . . . But I was afraid to wait. Youth was slipping away, and . . . a man is only a man. He can't live his life and be an anchorite. So at any rate I reasoned. Daphne, I have done wrong."

She fought down her sobs. "But two wrongs do not make a right. What you have done you have done."

He nodded, then turned away sharply with a catch of his breath. Her noble loveliness went through him like the thrust of a sword. He thought of Shelley's line:

> ". . . . . garmented in light
> From her own beauty."

Yes, from a beauty born of goodness and truth and loyalty and courage.

Her finger touched gently the sleeve of his shirt.

"It is time we went back to the house. We are to start at noon."

CHAPTER X

Arrived at the steep bluff known as Lovers' Leap, the party in the touring car separated into couples, leaving the man Flanders to arrange the luncheon. Rosenbloom and Mrs. Bock chose to stroll into the grove and sit down on one of the rustic benches they found there. Lambert and Miss Dixon, more active physically, preferred to climb the forest-clad hill leading to the summit.

Dick was at that stage of the pursuit when he was still in vexed and poignant doubt as to his conquest. He had tasted her hot kisses. But how much did they mean? She was one of those very alluring women who retain in their face and form the freshness of innocence. Had he won her? Or had he merely stormed the outer works? In short, was he victor or victim?

He was a male coquette, of the type that will take all an attractive woman will give. His impel-

ling desire was born of the monumental vanity of the professional woman-hunter. Love to him was compounded, three parts of this vanity and one of passion. He talked about affinity and a lot of other rubbish, but he was spurred mainly by the lust of conquest, the seal and proof of which was possession.

Externally Jimmie Dixon, for all the manner of innocence she held at such artistic command, was a suave gracious Pharisee of the modern American world. She, too, was a coquette, and the shadow of forbidden knowledge lay over her soul. Essentially she was far hotter of blood than Lambert. For this reason she protected herself warily, went at the sex duel far more deliberately and coolly than he. She could not afford to lose, nor had she any intention of doing so. There had been moments in their affair when the drag of sex had swept her away, but in the main she had held Dick off easily enough. No passionate sentiment had flashed between them.

In point of fact there was another man staying at Red Holm who drew her more potently; and hitherto she had not succeeded in getting him to look at her with anything more than civility in his eyes.

With sharp jealousy she saw that his looks were all for another woman. Hilary had come before her as a new type, one that represented power, self-mastery, dominance. She had let her shy soft eyes rest on him in vain, and his indifference had piqued both her interest and her resentment.

Lambert, an attentive cavalier, lent her his hand to climb some rocks in the trail. The difficulty surmounted, he did not release her fingers.

"When you-all are quite through with my hand," she drawled, lightly derisive.

"How can you be so cruel, Jimmie?" he pleaded.

Her long-lashed eyes, tolerantly amused, rested on him lazily. His smart London clothes looked a trifle too new, fitted him just a little too perfectly. In the matter of dress he overdid details the least bit. It wasn't necessary for a man to look as if he had just been upholstered. But Jimmie could not deny him good looks and a certain pleasant knack of making women like him. Until the last day or two she had been quite eager to chain him to her chariot wheel. Now there was a fly in the ointment. Into her orbit had pushed a pair of lean shoulders,

muscular and broad, carrying a small head with sunburnt hair and face deeply tanned, from which steady gray eyes had looked at her with only the interest demanded by politeness. Straightway Lambert had become a negligible quantity. She wanted to subjugate the man of the desert, this light-stepping young Hermes who spoke in crisp monosyllables.

"You said you would behave if I came to Red Holm," she accused.

He bit his lip with vexation. Dick did not like to make mistakes at this game, but he saw that today they were somehow out of tune with each other.

"Do you want me to be as cold as a stone statue? And I thought you cared for me."

"I do, old silly." She managed to make of the epithet a languid caress.

He looked into the tawny eyes of her dark elfish face and for all their softness they were inscrutable. There were strange flashes in them that burned his blood, that intoxicated with delirium. He longed to beat through them to the thought behind. Knowing her for what she was, a born coquette, of none

too strict moral fiber, he yet writhed to convince himself that she was his, that his attractions had reduced her to primal Eve by the alchemy of some magic.

"You know what I mean, Jimmie. To me you're the Queen of Love. There isn't anybody else in the world. Other women simply don't exist. I've had other affairs of course, but they don't count now. There's only you, Jimmie . . . just you."

She smiled from her masked eyes. "As if you didn't tell all the others that, too."

"Ah, but I mean it with you! That's the difference." He caught her in his arms. "I love you. Your eyes are heavy with sweetness. Your lips are audaciously pretty. Oh, girl . . . dear heart . . . tell me that you love me."

"I reckon I do."

But though she submitted to his kisses she did not return them. Presently she pushed him back. "Now you be good and behave, like you promised."

"I will if I can."

"You'd better, if you want me to stay at Red Holm."

"I said I would," he retorted sulkily.

"Now don't be foolish, Dick," she relented. "Can't you see things are different now?"

"Yes, I see they are, but I don't know why."

She puckered her mouth at him whimsically. "Because of . . . Daphne."

"I don't know what difference she makes. You knew about her before."

"Yes, but now I'm her guest. That counts for something."

"Oh, well!" If that was her reason for holding him off he could put up with it. "How much does it count for?" he asked, with a smile.

"Never you mind, sir."

She nodded gaily at him and resumed the trail, moving up it with the lithe willowy motion of elastic youth. Nature, as well as art, had contributed to make of her a dangerously attractive woman.

They reached the summit and stood in silence while they regained breath. A magnificent sweep of field and forest unrolled itself before them to the horizon. She let her dreamy eyes roam over it, the lids half shut so that they gave to her face a slum-

berous effect. All forms of sensuous beauty appealed to her.

"Some view, eh?" Dick commented airily.

Miss Dixon nodded, still silent. She was seated on a flat boulder, chin cupped in hand.

"I'm feeling deuced hungry. Nothing like climbing for the appetite. Wonder if Flanders remembered to put in that claret you like. I told him not to forget."

"Thanks," she murmured negligently.

He got out his field glasses, focused them, and handed them to the young woman.

"See that car away off yonder in a tiny cloud of dust. Shouldn't wonder if it is Daphne and Hilary."

She brought herself back from her abstraction and took a long look at the moving dust cloud.

"Too far. Can't tell." Lowering the glasses, she looked directly at him. "Do you know, Dick Lambert, that you have for a wife the most attractive woman I ever saw?"

He was flattered. It was food to his vanity that all the things he owned should be admired as the

best procurable. But he couldn't quite let it go at that.

"Do you never look in the glass?"

"And you don't seem even to know it," she went on, disregarding his inane compliment.

"I expect I know it," he dissented, a little stiffly.

"But you're not very enthusiastic about it."

He shrugged. "Oh, well. She's my wife. And just now I happen to be enthusiastic about somebody else. Guess who?"

She ignored his attempt to carry the conversation back to a flirtatious issue. A little laugh welled up from her throat. "I don't see how under heaven you ever persuaded her to marry you."

He straightened and shot an offended glance at her. "Don't you?"

She shook her head. "No, I don't see how you hypnotized her into it."

"You're very complimentary, I must say."

Her eyes rested on him with slow amusement. "Don't get mad. What I mean is that you're hardly up to her weight, Dick."

"That makes it a lot better, doesn't it?" he growled.

"You're a goose, Dickie. I mean she isn't your sort and you're not hers. She takes life pretty seriously, I judge."

"Oh, if that's what you mean." He was distinctly relieved. It was not, after all, a reflection on his charms. "Yes, Daphne's a blue stocking. I ain't. That's a fact."

"Were you very much in love when you married her?"

"I suppose most men are," he answered, a little warily, for her unfathomable eyes were studying him steadily.

"And she? Was she in love with you?"

He twirled his little black mustache and smiled blandly. "That isn't quite for me to say, is it? Not playing the game, you know. You'll have to guess as to that."

"And you've been married . . . how long?"

"Several years. You mentioned enthusiasm. A man can't keep at white heat forever, you know."

"Some men can't—with the same woman," she admitted.

"That's what I meant." He folded his arms

across the rock against which he was leaning and smiled across at her. "Now there is a woman I could——"

"Are you pretty good friends with her?" the girl interrupted, following her own train of thought.

"Sometimes—and then sometimes not so good. We don't quarrel, if that's what you mean."

"Never?" she flashed at him.

"No-o. She gives me fits, you know, once in a blue moon, but in a perfectly businesslike way. It never runs to a quarrel."

"About what?"

"Oh, about——" He grinned knowingly across at her. "About the ladies."

"She objects?"

"Around Brentford only. It's sanctuary here, you see. My wild oats aren't to be sown around home."

She was trying to discover something. Though she was almost sure, she let him have it straight from the shoulder.

"You aren't ever . . . lovers . . . any more, are you?"

An angry flush mounted to his face. His vanity

had guarded for years as a secret their relationship. The truth was the last thing he would have admitted, that any woman—least of all his own wife—could stand out against him when he chose to be a lover.

"You seem to know all about it. Did she tell you?" he retorted satirically, an ugly sneer on his lip.

Her eyes reproached him dumbly for misjudging her. "It isn't any of my business. You're right. I only wanted to know because——"

"Because of what?"

"Never mind." She was punching a hole in the ground with the tip of her parasol and was very busy with it. But he observed that a faint wave of color had beat into her face.

"But I do mind. What were you going to say?"

"Only that . . . that . . ."

"Go on . . . dearest." Excitement was showing in his eyes. He had jumped to the conclusion she had intended.

The long eyelashes fluttered up, then fell again

to the hot cheeks. "No, I can't say it . . . I only thought . . ."

"Something about us?" he whispered eagerly.

"Only that it might . . . make a difference." She breathed the words almost inaudibly as if in shame, then flashed him one shy seductive glance.

He was on a knee beside her in an instant, in the full flush of one of his emotional transports. "Forgive me, dear one. I'll tell you my closest secrets if you ask them. . . . In sacred confidence, you understand. . . . I know how scrupulous you are, your high sense of honor. But . . . you needn't hesitate on that account. My wife and I are not—er—lovers at the present time. Perhaps you can guess how those things are. At times. . . . But I know you understand."

She did, pretty thoroughly. He did not see the flash of triumph in her eyes concealed by falling lids. She had wanted to know because of its bearing on Daphne's possible relations to Hilary. She judged her rival a good woman, one who would not play false with her husband. But if she owed Lambert no duties of love—— Well, at least that altered the

equation. It made permissible in a sense a love affair with the Western engineer. If Daphne wanted to marry Hilary a divorce might soon be on the cards. Miss Dixon could only guess at the status of things. That Gordon was interested in Mrs. Lambert she knew. Whether the fancy was reciprocal she could not say. Anyhow, if one were going to put a spoke in the wheel it must be before it got to moving too fast.

Miss Jimmie, soft outside but steel within, smiled down into the ardent face upturned to hers. One of her hands passed absently over the crisp black curls of his handsome head.

"You're a dear boy, Dick, but—I sometimes wonder at you."

"Yes? How do you mean?" His thoughts were still a color riot of the imagination.

She was a young woman of elisions and inferences. It was her way to move by suggestion.

"Oh, I was just thinking!" Apparently her thoughts had trailed away again.

"Well, what are you thinking?"

She came to herself with a start. "But I'm not

going to tell you." The refusal was softened with a smile.

"Oh, but you are. I want to know. You've got to share all your thoughts with me now."

"Not this one, Dick. It's foolish anyhow."

Her hand brushed his temple and moved down his cheek, so lightly that the balls of her fingers tickled him deliciously.

"This one particularly." He had an impression it had to do with her fondness for him and his vanity lapped up the hope eagerly.

Miss Jimmie shook her head decisively. "No, it was right foolish of me."

Lambert took the masterful tone. "I'm going to keep kissing you till you tell me."

She shut her eyes and took his kisses as a purring cat does the strokings of his mistress. But presently she pushed him away.

"Oh, well, if I must. But it's right mean of you to make me."

"I'm not making you," he exulted. "Take your own time. I'm satisfied the way things were."

"Now you sit over there." She indicated a

boulder opposite. "It was nothing anyhow. I was still thinking about your wife—how attractive she is."

"Oh! Is that all?" His disappointment crept into his expectant face.

"I suppose other men . . ." She fell into a muse, not finishing in words.

"She never looks at other men," he announced flatly.

"Doesn't she?"

The note of amused incredulity in her languid drawl brought his gaze sharply to her face. "What do you mean?"

"Really, nothing. One fancies things, you know—gets impressions. Very likely they are all wrong."

He settled himself to storm her reluctance. "You might as well out with it first as last. What have you got up your sleeve, Jimmie?"

"But it isn't anything. You're making too much of a trifle. I was just wondering if—well, if other men are as blind to her charms as you are, since you must have it."

"I tell you she never looks at men. She's as cold as ice, Daphne is." There was an accent of sharpness in his manner.

"And of course your cold, silent women never can be warmed." The tilted smile she tossed at him belied the words.

"Not Daphne. I know her."

"Hm! When the right man comes along?"

"There isn't any right man for her. She's not like the rest of us. I understand her; you don't."

She folded her hands demurely in her lap. "Then of course that settles it. Shall we go down again now? It must be about time for lunch."

"No, we'll not go down again—not till I know what you're driving at."

Her little laugh rippled out. "Gracious, but you make a lot out of nothing. And since I was mistaken anyhow——"

"Mistaken in what?"

She shrugged her high shoulders. "What harm does it do even if a man admires her? Especially since she doesn't care for that sort of thing."

"Put a name to the man."

"If you haven't eyes yourself——"

"You don't mean Hilary."

"Don't I?"

"Do you?"

Their looks met.

"What do you think?" she drawled.

He recalled the morning swim, their early breakfast together, the golfing lesson, and the subsequent drive to Lovers' Leap. Never before had Daphne showed even a casual interest in a man.

"They haven't known each other twenty-four hours. It's ridiculous," he protested.

"Can you measure such things in days? How long had you known me before . . . you took an interest?"

"But Daphne is different, I tell you."

"And I tell you that we're all alike at bottom. Besides, how do you know she has known him only since he came to Red Holm? What about his long walks? Isn't it just possible——? Mind, I only ask."

To Lambert's memory flashed a reference made by Flanders the evening before, one he had not

understood at the time nor had considered important enough to push home. The man had mentioned seeing him at the cañon cottage on the evening they had dined at Creston. Hilary had made an excuse not to join the party. Had he been the man Flanders had mistaken for Dick? On the face of it there was something strange in the way that Daphne, always so reserved, had given herself to an immediate friendship with the engineer. The explanation of this might lie in the fact that she had met him before.

Suspicions trooped through his mind.

"Have you noticed that he is interested in Daphne?"

Her little laugh had malice in it. "He never looks at anybody else—that is, no more than he does at the other furniture."

He got up abruptly. "Nothing to it. Let's go down to lunch."

Miss Jimmie covered a smile with her hand. His self-esteem would not let him confess that he was jealous. But she knew just the same that the seed she had dropped would germinate rapidly and come to fruition.

CHAPTER XI

Dick Lambert walked down the mountain in an ugly temper that grew on him. He kept up his end of the small talk, but he had lost his zest for it. His shoulders no longer held their arrogance, his stride its confidence. Miss Dixon, watching him covertly from her masked smiling eyes, knew that beneath the surface his mind was busy with the problem she had pushed before it.

The thought that rankled was the fear lest another man might win where he had failed. Any good-looking woman, so long as she was unconquered, was a challenge to him. Ever since their marriage his wife had been an intermittent one. He could go away and forget for a time the humiliation of his situation, but his return to Brentford always carried with it the sting of his one great defeat. She was a beautiful woman and his wife, but his lips had never touched hers since the morn-

ing the parson had pronounced them man and wife. There were hours when he writhed with the humiliation of it and others when the desire of her flowed through him like heady wine.

He was afraid of her; that was the truth of it. Deep in his heart he knew that she was a thoroughbred and he was not. Her cool scorn of him, her reserves, the depth and purity of her nature, all hedged her from his impulses. Moreover, she held the whip hand and would not be afraid to use it. She was his financial source of supplies.

As for his good looks, his jaunty assumptions, they made no impression. The attractions that went so far with other women missed her altogether.

More than once he had attempted to put their relation on another footing. Each time she had met his lovemaking with a stinging contempt that burned. Since he was the sort of man who always wanted a luxury denied him, his thwarted desires were a banked fire within.

As he passed down the steep hill the door of his memory swung open on a night when wine and his passion had made him bold. It had been about two

years after their marriage. That day he had returned to Brentford after a long absence. He had carried his invalid mother down to the dining room to celebrate the event and the three of them had eaten dinner together. For Aimée's sake Daphne had simulated a friendly interest in his travels. Presuming on her kindness, he had trod softly down the corridor to her rooms long after she had disappeared for the night.

He had knocked very softly and entered before an answer could come. While he was hesitating in the dressing room the door of the bedroom opened and Daphne stood in the entrance. In one of her hands was a hair brush; the other held together the edges of a dressing robe. Above her clasp he could see the rise and fall of her bosom beneath the white embroidered nightgown. Evidently she had been combing her hair, for it fell free down her back and about her shoulders in a splendid rippling torrent of molten copper.

She was not in the least afraid or embarrassed.

"Has Aimée had an attack?" were her first words.

"No. It isn't that." Already he foretasted de-

feat, but he went through with it. "Daphne! I—I——" His arms opened to her in a futile sort of way.

Then she had understood. She stood a moment gathering her wrath.

"You . . . liar," she breathed, and in her eyes was a sword flash.

All his assurance had fled. A few stammering words was the best he could do for himself before the storm fell. Her low curt sentences had been like lashes across the face. Beaten without a fight, he had turned and sneaked back to his room.

Next morning Flanders had waited on him with a sealed note. The envelope contained a check and one line of writing.

"You will leave on the noon train."

That was all, no greeting and no signature.

He had taken his orders like the whipped cur he was. For fear he might see her again he had breakfast in his own room. While she was riding over the place with the overseer he had ordered the car and slipped out of the house with his trunks. A

hurried letter explained to his mother that he had been called to New York on urgent business. He had not set foot in Brentford again until six months later, when a telegram had summoned him on account of a sudden seizure his mother had suffered.

The episode had been a bitterly humiliating one, and it still rankled whenever Lambert thought of it.

The possibility that another man could win her love where he had so completely failed came to him with a recurrent sting. All through luncheon he was alert to catch any sign of an understanding between Hilary and his wife. In this he did not succeed, though the Westerner was openly an admirer within bounds.

After they had finished eating he attached himself to his wife with the evident intention of sticking. Miss Dixon helped him out by forcing Hilary to climb the Leap with her, and Rosenbloom disappeared for a saunter with Antoinette.

Daphne detected with a faint amusement the maneuvers of Dick and Miss Jimmie. Since it suited her to be separated from Gordon for a time

she did not stir herself to make a re-alignment. Indeed, she was mildly curious to learn what was back of her husband's sudden devotion.

Dick found some difficulty in approaching the subject in his mind. He drifted with Daphne to one of the rustic seats in the grove and fingered a cigar restlessly.

"You may smoke," she told him quietly.

"Thanks, awf'lly." It occurred to him that he had rather overdone his gratitude for a small favor, and he made it more noticeable by adding: "Of course if you object——"

"If I had I shouldn't have suggested it," she replied, her amused eyes on a chipmunk.

"Just so . . . Of course not. Well, I think I *will* light up." He cupped his hands on the blaze of a match and puffed for a few moments. "I say, Daphne, did you ever—er—meet our friend Hilary before I introduced you to him?"

Her eyes came straight to his. "Who told you I had met him?" she asked, in a perfectly even voice.

"Well—er—nobody exactly. I just wondered."

"Oh! You just wondered."

He threw a furtive glance her way. "Thought perhaps you might have happened to meet him some time."

"What made you think so?" she asked, after a moment's pause.

"I don't know. Just a notion. You and he seemed to take quite a shine to each other. Like old friends, you know."

"He happens to be an interesting man."

"You think so. Can't say I fancy his style."

"No?"

"Of course I may be prejudiced on account of his being mixed up in this Bock divorce affair," he admitted, with an air of candor, examining the end of his cigar impartially.

Mirth crinkled her face for a moment. Dick in the rôle of a censor of vice was really too absurd.

"But before I invited your friends you assured me they were quite respectable," she countered.

"Oh, respectable! But a woman can't be too careful. You know that. A man may do for an acquaintance, but when it comes to taking him for a friend—— You get the distinction."

"Then you wouldn't recommend Mr. Hilary as a friend."

"Candidly, no! By the way, did you say you hadn't met him before yesterday?" he asked casually.

"I didn't say."

Her husband made another try. "Flanders mentioned seeing you with a man one evening up the cañon."

Daphne did not make the least movement, nor did her eyes flinch, but her brain had suddenly quickened to alertness. "Did he?"

"Mistook the man for me and mentioned it later. I didn't correct him."

"Correct him?"

"His mistake. I let him think it was I."

"Did you?"

"Yes. I don't suppose the man was Hilary?" Again his glance raked her covertly.

Her gaze was on the chipmunk. Evidently she had nothing to say in regard to the point raised by her husband. Lambert's temper began to take an edge.

"I've asked a question, Daphne."

"Have you?"

"And I'd like an answer."

"I don't want to be unpleasant, Dick, but I'm afraid I'll have to remind you that your question is one which concerns me alone," she told him coolly.

"Does it? I'm not so sure about that. Though you choose to ignore the fact completely I'll merely mention that I'm your husband."

She looked at him very steadily. "No. You're not that . . . and never will be. Moreover, that subject is closed. I must ask you not to reopen it."

"I have some rights," he grumbled.

"I wouldn't try to enforce any if I were you."

"You treat me like a dog," he burst out childishly.

"I treat you as I choose. If you don't like it you have a recourse."

"Most men wouldn't stand it," he fumed.

"I'm quite sure they wouldn't," she agreed.

"And right now I'll serve notice of one thing. I'm not going to have any intrigue going on under

my eyes. If you're too good for me you're too good for this other man. Stick a pin in that."

"Be careful," she advised, very quietly.

"Do you deny you met this man at the cottage? Do you deny that he's making a conspicuous set at you?"

"I deny your right to question me." She rose and turned back toward the motor cars.

Lambert stood in the way. "Hold on, Daphne. Let's have this thing out. I don't want to quarrel with you, but I want to settle where we stand. Do you want me to stand back and let you flirt with this fellow? Is that what you mean?"

Excitement trembled in his voice, shook the hand in which he held his cigar. She, to the contrary, was quite composed, a fine-lined perfectly poised figure with the marks of race in the cold clean-cut face.

"I have in a safety deposit vault an agreement signed by you. Must I recall to you its terms?"

"I know the terms all right," he admitted sulkily. "You were to go your own way and I wasn't to interfere. But this is different. At that time we

didn't figure on another man butting in. I won't stand for that. No man would."

Her voice was like the splash of ice water. "I admit nothing. I deny nothing. But I hold you absolutely to the agreement. You get an allowance from me so long as you behave with reasonable decency while you are here. But I am free as air. You have no shadow of a claim on me or on my conduct. You have not even the freedom of discussing it with me. It is all down in black and white, as you know perfectly well."

"Mayn't I even protect my good name?"

A faint ironic smile rested in her eyes. The good name of which he was so solicitous had taken care of itself through several years of disgraceful dissipation. "I think you may safely leave that with me."

"Oh, very well. But this Hilary——"

"You will leave our guest's name out of our talk, please."

"You don't understand. It doesn't take much to tarnish a woman's name. She has to be very care-

ful, especially in a place like Brentford, where your business is everybody's."

Again there was a flash of scornful amusement in her face. He ought to be an authority on that subject.

"Thank you. Now if you're quite through we'll talk about something else."

Hurt vanity and resentment flamed up in him. "Why are you so devilish hard on me, Daphne? Why don't you listen to me with respect at least?"

"I'm ready to listen on any matter that does not concern my private affairs."

"You never have given me a chance. You always have pushed me down," he complained sourly.

"That is absurd. I've left you entirely to yourself."

"And so I've had to find my amusements with . . . other people. What's the matter with me, anyhow? Why do you hate me so?"

"I don't hate you at all."

"You act as if I had small-pox. Why aren't you friends with me? Why don't you trust me?"

A dull anger began to burn in her. "The reasons are entirely obvious. I don't care to go into them."

"I'm just like other men. I don't claim to be a saint. For that matter, no man is."

"I'd like to go back to my car if you'll let me pass."

"In a minute. Tell me first why you treat me like the dirt under your feet. What's wrong with me? How am I worse than any other fellow?"

"The subject does not interest me. Kindly let me pass."

"No, I'm damned if I do. Beg pardon, but it's enough to make a man swear. . . . You answer my question, Daphne."

They never had quarreled. She had seen to it that their relationship had never become intimate enough to justify quarrels. But he had her penned between the seat and a big gooseberry bush. There came to her a sudden impulse to tell him the truth about himself.

"You want to know how you are different from the other men I know. I'll tell you, then. The

average man is master of himself—to a reasonable extent. He has some fixed character. You have none. Every impulse sways you. Every desire is stronger than your will. He—the average man—has a grip on himself. He doesn't depress his nerves with tobacco, or spur them with liquor. He doesn't dissipate himself in little debauches, and fool himself into the belief that he is a gay dog simply because he is a weakling. He has some stamina."

Lambert was in a pale, sullen rage, unless his face belied him. "Much obliged. Anything more?"

She laid on the whip with cool, merciless strokes.

"I haven't an employee on this place who isn't a king beside you. Why? Because he is master of his desires. He rules them; they don't rule him. But you—you've lost out because you haven't the courage to be a man. You haven't the character to set your teeth and cut out your swinishness and run a straight course. There's hope for a strong bad man; he may reform. But a weakling who has gone bad . . . there's as much hope for a rotten apple. Do I make myself clear?"

"Quite."

He bowed unsteadily, stood aside, and let her pass.

As she went down the trail a cold anger still burned in her breast. He had dared to interfere! He had presumed to dictate in her private affairs! She would teach him his place.

CHAPTER XII

During the walk up the steep wooded slopes of Lovers' Leap Miss Dixon was discretion itself. Hilary had believed her a siren, but now he persuaded himself he had done her an injustice. There was a note of naïveté in her talk, of elfin grace in her movements, that accorded with the innocence of her deep eyes. Her manner to him had just the touch of shy deference, of almost fascinated interest in what he told her of his life in the West, that coming from so attractive a woman was calculated to flatter any man.

Moreover, Miss Jimmie was so enthusiastic about her hostess, so generous in her appreciation of her, that Gordon was quite touched. Apparently she had had a change of heart.

"I didn't know she was like that," the young woman confided. "All I knew about her was what

Dick had told me, and I can see now that he doesn't understand her at all. She's the loveliest woman I ever met . . . and good. Dick isn't half good enough for her. Is he, Mr. Hilary?"

"No."

"She is like one of the beautiful young Madonna pictures. When you are with her you feel somehow more noble, as if life was a big splendid thing. At least that's how I feel. Don't you?"

Gordon confessed to having known some such impulse.

"I don't see how you men keep from falling in love with her. But of course if you did it would just be as a good Catholic does with a lovely saint."

He met her rapier glance with a laugh. "Oh, of course."

So it happened that they came back to the picnic grounds much better friends than they had started. Of course her affair with Dick Lambert was all wrong. She had been misled by an accomplished scoundrel. But Hilary was disposed to lay the blame largely on the man. He felt that he understood Jimmie Dixon better than he had. Hot South-

ern suns had given her a passionate full-blooded nature. Essentially both innocent and voluptuous, she had come easily under the sway of such a bold, handsome seducer as Lambert. But he knew she was still safe—or at least he believed so—and every honest fiber in him resolved to put a stop to the fellow's game.

On the return trip to Red Holm Rosenbloom took Hilary's place with Daphne in the runabout and the engineer sat in the tonneau of the big car beside Antoinette.

"I've got something to tell you, but not now. We'll take a walk after dinner if you don't mind," Mrs. Bock told him in a whisper before they drew up in front of the house.

Gordon nodded assent. He helped her out, and the party broke up to dress for dinner.

In the moonlight after dinner Gordon and Antoinette sauntered across the lawn to the tennis court and sat down on one of the benches there. He adjusted the wrap about her shoulders carefully, for Mrs. Bock was just a little afraid of rheumatism.

"Do you know, Gordon, that this is the first time I've been alone with you since we came to Red Holm?"

"There do seem to be a good many people about usually."

She smiled a little wistfully. "I can remember a time when we never let twenty-four hours pass without being alone no matter how many people there were around."

"What's the answer? Are we getting old? Or are you busy with your other friends?"

Her sidelong glance dwelt on his face. "Do you care if I am busy with them? That is, particularly?"

He brushed the ash from his cigar and looked at the tip carefully before he answered.

"Why do you ask that, Toinette?"

"Because I want to know."

"I like you to enjoy yourself. I'm no Bluebeard."

He was subtly aware that the atmosphere was charged with electricity.

"I've been with another man a good deal. It doesn't make you . . . jealous?"

"No-o. I can't say it does. Should it?" He smiled across at her, quite undisturbed.

"If you were a very ardent lover don't you think it would?"

"Perhaps I *am* growing old. The desert takes youth out of a man pretty fast."

"Maybe you haven't noticed it, but we are in the shadow of a big tree. Nobody can see us."

He was a little puzzled to get at her meaning. "Well?"

In her laugh was just a hint of irritation. "You *are* obtuse. Mix up moonlight and shadows and the face of the woman a man loves. What does he do?" She held up a hand to keep him back. "No, thank you. I don't want any of your duty kisses, Gordon. But doesn't your negligence prove my point . . . that the edge of your fondness for me has worn off?"

"How about yours for me?" he countered.

"We're coming to that. I asked my question first."

"I'm not a very experienced lover. Perhaps I ought to have shown myself more eager, less tol-

erant of your friends when they absorb your time."

"I didn't say you ought, but . . . don't dodge, Gordon. Let's be frank with each other. Do you really want to marry me?"

His heart was beating fast with excitement. Was it hope? Or was it dread?

"I stand pat, Toinette. I'm ready to see it through if you are."

Her chin on her doubled fingers, she watched him steadily. "You haven't answered my question."

"And I don't intend to until I know what you're driving at."

"Just this, old boy. I'm too good a friend to let you marry me when you don't love me. It was a mistake. Thank goodness, we've found it out in time."

His heart leaped. But yet he protested. "Wait a minute, Toinette. Do you mean that you don't . . . care for me that way, either?"

Again she smiled ruefully. "When a woman is a girl her love goes out in spite of her. But when she reaches a certain age she keeps it for the man who wants it. You don't want mine, Gordon."

He colored. "You make me out rather a cad, Toinette."

"You're one of the decentest chaps I've ever met. But we wouldn't have made a go of it. This way is better." After a moment she added: "Don't blame yourself. And don't be sorry for me. I've got something else to tell you."

His eyes found hers in quick question. She was blushing.

Hilary laughed outright. "Oh, is that it? You want to be sure you are off with the old love before you are on with the new."

"To-day Mr. Rosenbloom asked me if I would marry him. I've known ever since—well, ever since the decree that he was going to ask me if I decided to let him."

"And you decided to let him?"

"No-o, not exactly. He rather got away from me and——"

"And asked before you were ready for him. Hurrah for Rosenbloom!"

"It quite exhilarates you, doesn't it?"

"What did you tell him?"

Her face, with the blush still on it, crinkled to merriment. "That this was so sudden."

Hilary laughed with her out of sheer lightheartedness. "But after due consideration you're going to make him a happy man."

"If you approve."

He took on an air of mock severity. "That depends. In the first place, are you fond of him?"

"I like him very much."

"Hm! Is that enough?"

"I think so. Our tastes are similar. We like the same things. I've always admired him."

"And is he hard hit?"

She looked demurely at the laced hands in her lap. "That's the impression I gather. Really, Gordon, I believe we're going to make a go of it. I'm an expensive luxury, but he won't mind that. At bottom I'm quite domestic. So is he."

"You deserve to find your happiness, Toinette," he told her warmly. "You've been cheated of it long enough. I hope at last you're coming to your own. I believe it."

"Thanks, dear boy," she nodded, her eyes veiled with sudden tears.

Her hand was already in his. By a common impulse their lips met for the last time.

The sound of a light footfall separated them.

"Who was that?" Hilary asked, in a whisper.

From among the trees came the flash of a vanishing white skirt. Gordon's heart was troubled. He felt instinctively sure that Daphne had surprised them in each other's arms. No doubt the sight of it had stabbed her heart. He must go to her as soon as possible.

At the porch he excused himself. "If you don't mind I'll not go in just now. A cigar out here would suit me better."

But as soon as she had passed into the hall Hilary turned and walked swiftly across the lawn. He moved through the grove back of the tennis court, his eyes and ears alert to catch any sign of the presence of the woman he loved. There were scarce a score of trees in the clump and she was not among them. Beyond lay the open country of the golf

links. She must have pushed on to this in the hope of being more surely alone.

Gordon recalled that another little clump of elms lay to the right of the fourth green. Swiftly he strode forward, eager to see her again so that he might tell her the good news that had come to him. But he went warily, too, for he wanted to surprise her if he could.

She was sitting on a bench with her back to him under the heavy shadows of a great tree. He stole forward noiselessly, crept round the trunk of the tree till he was just back of her, then stooped and kissed the lips he tilted back to meet his.

She gave a startled little cry, tried to rise, and slipped on a projecting root of the tree. Her foot was caught, and before he could reach her she had collapsed to the ground.

"Dearest! Are you hurt? What a fool I am to do such a thing!"

He was beside her in an instant, his arms about her, his face brushing hers as he held her tight.

"Tell me you're not hurt," he begged.

With the slightest turn of the body she nestled to him, her cheek against his. "No-o, I'm not hurt . . . except my ankle. And it doesn't matter."

Abruptly Hilary's head came up. That soft drawl sent a shock down his spine. The woman he held in his arms was not Daphne, but Miss Dixon.

There was an instant's deadly silence before she spoke. "But it does hurt a good deal. I must have turned it. Would you mind unlacing my shoe, please?"

"Certainly. Of course." The Westerner's words came jerkily. "I'm the prize idiot of fourteen counties. Can you ever forgive me for being such a goat?"

Already his trembling fingers were busy with the lace. He dared not look in her face after what he had said and done.

"It's nothing . . . dear. I . . . I'm glad of it, if you want to know." In her voice was a suggestion of the jubilance that lies between laughter and tears.

His heart felt as if it had been drenched with ice water. She was going on the natural assumption that he had known who she was. His lips felt dry and parched, but he opened them to explain. Then he realized that he couldn't tell her the truth without incriminating Daphne.

"I . . . I must ask you to pardon me. I thought . . . it would be a joke to surprise you. . . . You know I'm that ass the village cutup."

Desperately he was trying for a way out, but he could not find one open. He realized that she supposed he had followed her to make love to her; and what was worse that she was glad of it.

"I'm not mad. Perhaps I ought to be, but I'm not," she said, in the softest of voices, with a droop of her lids that hid the fond eyes after they had met his for a moment.

"Of course you ought to be. I'm a clumsy dolt taking liberties I have no right to," he insisted promptly.

"Unless I give you the right," she murmured. "Ouch!"

He had drawn the lace open and now was trying to slip off the shoe.

"Hurts pretty bad, does it?" he asked gently.

Her face was averted and her hand hid her eyes. He felt that it was so he might be spared the sight of her pain.

"Go ahead! Take it off. I can stand it."

"Just another moment, now," he comforted. "There. It's off."

The prettiest little silk-clad foot with the neatest of ankles lay in Hilary's hand. He put it down very softly on the turf and mopped the perspiration from his forehead.

"How is it now?"

"Oh, much better," she told him. "I'm making an awful fuss about it."

"I think you're a game little sport."

She smiled bravely up at him. "It was right painful, but from the look on your face it was hurting you a heap more."

"I wasn't enjoying it," he admitted. "Now, what? Shall I tie it up with my handkerchief?"

"I reckon you'll have to."

His hands were deft and he made a neat job of the bandaging. She stood it without a whimper, though once when he glanced at it Hilary thought her face had the drawn look of pain.

"The question before the house now is how I'm going to get you home," he said, with a cheerfulness he was far from feeling. "Do you mind waiting here while I run back for the ambulance corps?"

"Don't leave me . . . please, don't. I don't want to be left alone. I can walk. Truly, I can." She said it with such a pathetic eagerness that Hilary abandoned on the instant any intention of going for help.

"I don't think you had better try to walk. It might injure your ankle for life."

"Nonsense. It will soon be all right. If I were only on my feet."

She looked around helplessly, then caught at the bench to pull herself up. There was nothing else for it. He slipped his arm around her waist and supported her weight while he lifted her.

"Thank you."

She smiled gallantly at him, and from the soft

shadows the beauty of her big eyes rained on him. The lids closed. She swayed against him so that her warm, languorous body seemed to cling to his. The breath of her nostrils was on his neck. He thought she was going to faint.

As if with an effort she shook off her weakness.

"I'll do nicely now," she said, brushing the haze from her eyes. "But you'll have to be my crutch."

"You mustn't walk if it hurts. I could carry you if you like."

"I'm far too heavy. No, I'll walk. But it's right good of you to offer."

Hilary set his teeth with anger at his folly. Her soft voice vibrated emotion, her eyes poured it on him, her motions were melodious with it. And he had brought it all on himself by his incarnate idiocy.

Miss Jimmie took a few hesitant steps, and at each one her breath came like a sob. Gordon stopped.

"This won't do at all. Let me go for help. I won't be away ten minutes."

"Please, don't. I . . . I don't want to be alone. I know I'm foolish, but . . ." Her

voice broke. For the first time there were symptoms of a breakdown.

That settled it.

"I'm going to carry you. That's all there is to it. Here goes."

His arm swept back of her knees and he lifted her. He was a powerful man in his prime and her weight was nothing to him. He carried her easily without distress.

After he had gone perhaps a hundred yards he looked down to ask if she were comfortable. Her face startled him. A devil of a spirit, flushed and passionate, was burning out of it. The hot cheeks, the amorous lips sweet as honey, the great eyes from which streamed the languorous allure of the South, all told him the same story. He had but to take her. She was his, fruit ripe for the plucking.

The blood stormed in his arteries. He was a man, young and full-natured, with all the heritage of his sex. A woman, desirable and desirous, was in his arms. With all the art of her nature she wooed him. Silently, with the soft still night in alliance, she staked her cards to storm him. The

curve of her soft, burning cheek, the warmth of her young body as it lay against his, the floating tendrils of her hair that brushed his face, the appeal of her eyes, of her mouth, even the knowledge that she was suffering physical pain because of him: all of them were trumps in the game she played.

She saw the lean muscles standing out on his clamped jaws. He was fighting for all he was worth to hold out. Her bare arm, soft as satin, slid round his neck. It seemed to strangle his will. She drew her face to his. When he turned to protest her passionate lips fastened to his.

His senses crashed. An intoxicating perfume drugged him. He felt as if he were stumbling as he walked. For the moment he knew nothing but the desire of her.

But he had not been master of himself all those desert years for nothing. He called to his will and it responded. Simultaneously there jumped to his mind a picture of Daphne's trustful face.

"No . . . no . . . There's another woman," he said hoarsely.

Then she made her great mistake. "Another man's wife," she flung back.

Hilary's brain cleared. For the moment he had seen her with mask off. Now he knew that his first impressions had been correct. She was Delilah, after all, and spiteful Delilah at that. He grew hard and cold.

"We'll not discuss that, if you please, Miss Dixon."

After that he might have been carrying a sack of meal for all the difference it meant to him. He was thoroughly disgusted with himself. She had made a fool of him, and that after he had been warned by the little episode beneath his window. No callow boy could have been victimized more neatly.

When he reached the tennis court Hilary put her down on the seat. "I'll go into the house and announce that you've been hurt. It will be better than to have me walk in with you," he said.

"Just as you say."

Anger and annoyance surged through her. In

a revulsion of feeling she detested him because he had refused to play up to her lead. She understood that her failure was final. She had made her assault and he had flung her back. The sting of her humiliation made her writhe.

But she had her momentary revenge a few minutes later. Dick and Rosenbloom had carried her in and put her on a lounge in the big hall. Questions poured at her. How had it happened? And where? And how had she got back?

Miss Jimmie looked at Hilary for just an instant, then let the lashes shutter her shy eyes as if in embarrassment.

"We were on the golf links, dear people . . . Mr. Hilary and I . . . at the seat near the fourth green, in the clump of trees, you know . . . and it just happened that I slipped on a root of a tree . . . So Mr. Hilary took off my shoe . . . and tied up my ankle. Afterward he carried me in."

Her manner conveyed the impression—shouted it aloud in fact—that there was an understanding between them. The demurely downcast eyes, the hot cheeks, the failure to look round frankly on

the friends gathered about her, told plainer than words that she had omitted certain particulars.

Daphne, very pale but perfectly composed, looked once at Hilary and then looked away. He had been weighed and found wanting. Quietly she made the arrangements for her guest's comfort, sent for the doctor, had her carried to her room, and herself bathed the ankle and bandaged it temporarily.

Hilary was furious at Miss Dixon. With that shy ingenue manner of hers she had contrived to convey a lie to Mrs. Lambert, to tell her that he had been making love to her when the accident happened. He hung around restlessly, hoping against hope for a chance to explain. The chance did not come. Daphne's eyes definitely refused to meet his. He knew that she would take care not to let him see her alone before the house party broke up, which he judged would be as soon as she could arrange it without breach of hospitality.

Hilary, both angry and unhappy, went to his rooms and dressed in his riding togs. He wanted if he could to ride off the weight that lay on his heart.

"Give me Prince Rupert. I'm all for action tonight," he told the stableman.

"Sorry, sir. Prince Rupert ain't safe. He's a devil when he gets a notion. Nobody rides him but Mr. Lambert. Even Mrs. Lambert doesn't any more. She wants to sell the brute, but Mr. Lambert is partial to him."

"I'm a safe rider, Peters. I can manage the Prince and I particularly want him." A bill passed from his fingers to those of the man. "Come! You've had no orders to refuse me the horse, have you?"

"No, sir. No positive orders." He was plainly in doubt.

"And you have had orders to accommodate us with horses?"

"Yes, sir. That's quite right. And you're a good rider? Very well, sir. Prince Rupert it is. But you'll be very careful, won't you, sir?"

Hilary promised, and five minutes later went flying wildly into the night.

CHAPTER XIII

Miss Dixon insisted that the sprain was not serious. All her ankle needed was a rest. There was not a bit of use in getting a doctor. You could see it was not swollen at all.

Daphne, however, insisted on the doctor and took charge of the case until his arrival. There was, she said, such a thing as making too light of a sprain and regretting it later. So she bathed it with liniment, the while Miss Jimmie from her oval eyes watched her without appearing to do so. The patient's manner was eloquent of innocent embarrassment. She did not know at all what Mrs. Lambert would think of her for being alone with Mr. Hilary on the links after dinner. But really she had gone out by herself because the night was so still and lovely. She supposed that Mr. Hilary had seen her go and followed.

At this stage of her narrative—or was Daphne to consider it a confession?—the young woman became discreet to the point of indiscretion. She left the facts indefinite, but the hiatus that came after each little gush of explanation offered food for the imagination. Daphne was furiously jealous and despised herself for it. She could see Gordon Hilary making love to this girl as he had to her. She could see him carrying Miss Dixon across the links, and her fancy filled in the accompaniments of intimacy that must have gone with the situation.

The doctor's judgment confirmed that of the patient. There was no swelling and no fever. Give the ankle a day or two of rest and it would be all right. Privately he was of opinion that there had been not the least need of sending for him, but after the way of physicians he forbore to say so.

As soon as she could escape Daphne excused herself to her guests and retired to the seclusion of her own rooms, where she could be comfortably miserable without a mask of smiling pretense. She was sick and weary at heart. A poignant jealousy tortured her, and with it went a soul nausea that

drowned her in waves of despondency. Were all men scoundrels? Were there none that had a gleam of honor in them? She flayed herself for the love she had given so generously, put herself on the rack because she had made so little of herself as to offer all she had to one who did not know its value. Already he had come to be the most vital thing in her life. In the hollow of his careless hand he held her heart. Before her rose a vision of his splendidly poised well-shaped head, of his lean, bronzed face out of which looked so steadily the fearless gray eyes.

A sob rose in her throat and choked her. Surely God had not written the sign manual of his beauty on a liar and a scamp. His voice, his laugh, the crisp fall of his foot, had all the ring of truth. And yet he had betrayed her trust more flagrantly than Dick Lambert ever had done. The thing was unthinkable—and yet it was true.

While she sat in the darkness the heavy bitter hours passed. She heard the clock strike three times. Still she sat tense and motionless. It was in the small hours and her tragedy for very weari-

He waved a hand to her and staggered forward.

"Oh!" she cried, and flew toward him.

"Daphne! I knew you would come."

He clung to her, as a child to its mother, helpless but content. A wan smile struggled to his battered face. She was moved to the deeps of her nature by his utter dependence on her. She knew his head was not clear. All he understood was that he was hurt and wanted Daphne. And in the hour of his need the warm mother heart of her poured its love out regardless of his merit.

"Yes, dear . . . You've been hurt, but it will be all right now. I'll take care of you."

From beneath a stone she drew a key, unlocked the door, and flung it open. Her arm went about his waist to support his sagging weight. Slowly he moved forward to a lounge and sank upon it.

With trembling fingers she lit a lamp. In spite of her agitation she moved swiftly while she gathered water in a basin, a towel and a sponge.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

Her kind smile enveloped him. "Your poor head. . . . I'm going to wash it."

He yielded himself to her hands implicitly. The cold water seemed to bring him out of the daze in which he had been lying.

"Prince Rupert bolted while I was thinking of something else. . . . A limb of a tree hit my head."

"And then you fainted?"

"I suppose so. But I'll be all right now."

"Yes. It was the shock. Now lean back, please."

Instead he sat bolt upright. "No. Not yet. I remember now. I knew there was something. It's about Miss Dixon and me."

Her eyes flinched. "That will wait till later."

"Not a minute." He plunged at it. "What you think about us is a mistake."

Her heart pumped fast. "You can explain it when you are well. Lie down now, please," she told him gently.

"No. Listen to me, Daphne. I had something to tell you—something important. And when I thought I saw you going through the grove I followed. At the fourth green I found you sitting on a bench. So I crept up and kissed you. That

was what I thought, but it was Miss Dixon. She stumbled and hurt her ankle. She didn't want to be left alone there while I went for help. So I carried her in."

"You thought you were kissing me," breathed Daphne softly.

"Yes. And the worst of it was that I couldn't explain that to her. I talked some rot about a practical joke."

"And you didn't make love to her at all?"

"How could I, since I love you?"

Her mind flashed over the facts, recalled Hilary standing white and stern in the background while Miss Dixon flutteringly gave them both away, remembered the blushing innocence of that young woman as she later explained and explained till Daphne's suspicions were keen-edged; and she saw at once that the little vixen had drawn them into a trap. Probably the sprained ankle episode had been a myth from the first, devised merely to lure Hilary into an intimacy from which he could not retreat. Certainly it was strange that an ankle so badly

sprained had not swollen and showed no signs of fever.

He had offered no proof, but Daphne knew he was telling the simple truth. She put her arms round his neck and began to cry softly.

"You dear boy. . . . And I blamed you. I thought . . . Oh, it doesn't matter what I thought. But I doubted at the first chance. Oh, Daphne, you of little faith! And all the time I knew . . . I knew it couldn't be true."

"Of course it couldn't."

She came with remorse to another phase of the situation.

"If it hadn't been for my lack of faith you would never have ridden Prince Rupert . . . and you would never have been hurt. Will you forgive me, dearest, all that my weak lack of trust has done to you?"

From the pillows he smiled happily up at her. "I wouldn't change a thing. It has brought us here . . . together. Isn't that enough?"

But with the proud humility of a lover she had to

make full confession. She knelt beside the lounge, so that her white face with the vivid lips was close above his, and she poured it all out—all the heart-break of the passionate jealousy and despair she had known during those three dreadful hours.

His arms crept round the warm, slender body and tightened there. She was his, this eager, lovely creature whose heart was beating in wild delight against his hand like that of a captured bird. The wealth of love that poured from her spirited mobile face was all for him. It came to him to wonder how he had ever had the luck to win her. He knew she moved a queen among women by grace of natural endowment. From her throne she had come down to him with open arms, the dear eyes shining a benison upon him. To be worthy of her he must walk softly and yet without fear, reverently but still boldly. If he were to hold what he had won he must have both her fine sense of moral values and the wisdom for strong leadership a woman seeks in her mate.

So, for an hour, they lived in their world wonderful. She was nurse and mother and lover, and

he was in turn complement to each. Both were happy beyond expression. Both knew the joy that is so poignant because to all of us its life must be so brief. They laughed. They talked the nonsense which is the height of wisdom, since it is born of the perfect love which casteth out fear. They yielded to full-pulsed silences more pregnant than speech. And before they knew it envious day crept out of the east and flooded the world.

She drew a long breath. "I must take you home now—back to . . . the other woman."

It was the first time Antoinette Bock had come to the mind of either.

His laugh rang out free as that of a schoolboy on a holiday. "And to think I had forgotten it. That was my news, Daphne. That was why I followed you to the golf links, or thought I was, at least. I had to tell you, so that we could be glad together."

"You mean——?"

"That I've been jilted, that my lady has found a better and a handsomer man."

"Oh, Gordon! Really?"

"Cross my heart and hope to die. My lady

wrapped it up very nicely, and I shook hands and wished her joy."

"Who is the man?"

"Gentleman by the name of Rosenbloom, he of 'Eve, Adam, and the Apple' fame."

"He's ever so much better suited to her," Daphne pronounced promptly.

"I'm of that opinion myself. He seems to me a good sort, and I know she is." He began to hum gaily, "Here comes the bride."

She slanted an adorable smile at him. "You don't appear as depressed as a jilted man should be."

He answered her smile boldly. "I draw a consolation prize."

"You seem very sure about it, sir."

"Quite sure. The only thing that worries me is the date of the drawing. I haven't found a way to hurry it yet."

Underneath the surface talk Daphne's mind was busy with the changed status of their relationship. Gordon belonged to her now. No other woman had a claim on him. They could love now, and their love would be no robbery. Her heart was jumping

and playing queer tricks. But it was no song of exultation that moved her so profoundly. Fate had brought her to the parting of the ways. She shuddered. Her knees trembled so that there was no strength in her limbs. She must make her great decision, and once made it would be irrevocable.

She turned away, sat down in the big chair before the fireplace and began to draw her gauntlets on slowly.

"But I'll find a way—never fear. I'm not going to wait forever while time steals our youth. If we must grow old let it be together, dear heart," he continued confidently.

He rose and leaned over the back of the chair. The glorious hair of her bent head rippled in burnished waves. His fascinated hand passed over it again and again, came to rest at last against her satin cheek. The touch of his fingers sent queer thrills through her in waves. She felt as if she were drowning in emotion. Never before had the nearness of him so affected her, so stifled and flushed her. Was it because something had now become possible that she had not even let [illegible] sider

except during that one night walk on the heath with David? The drag of sex came to her as a terrible thing. She knew her face was afire with shame and outraged modesty and with something else that had lain banked in her all these years of maidenhood. For all the world she would not have had him see her then.

"Go . . . back to the lounge," she told him faintly.

"Are you ill?"

"No . . . but go."

She felt that she would have hated him if he had not gone. For a moment he hesitated, then turned and went without a word.

She must have time to think . . . time to think. Whatever she did must be done because it was best, after mature deliberation. How could she decide rationally now with this fierce beating of the blood in her veins? How could she decide at all fairly with her lover in the room, drawing her to him by a thousand tendrils that wound round her heart and strangled all considerations but those of desire?

"I'm going out. Wait here, please," she told him, and passed without looking at him, her cheeks aflame.

The morning sun was just tipping the horizon as Daphne walked down into the grove. A meadow lark flung his three joyous notes at her. The faintest crepitation of leaves stirred the pines to a gentle murmur. The world was waking gladly to a new day.

Gradually the peace of the morning stole over her. The self-control that was second nature to her reasserted itself. She walked back to the house and stepped inside.

Shyly she looked at her lover. "How is your head?"

"Didn't even know I had one till you spoke," he answered. "How is Mistress Daphne? And did she go out because I offended her?"

"No. I . . . I was taken a little faint. Are you ready to go back to Red Holm?"

"By your leave, I like it better here," he smiled.

She could meet his eyes now without fear. "Certainly, if you had rather, though I should think it

might be lonesome. I'll have Flanders come up and look after you."

"No, thanks. I'd rather go with my own nurse."

"Then I think we'd better be going."

She turned, but looked back at his "Just a moment, please." In his eager face she read what he wanted. A faint coral tide crept to her cheeks.

"Just one, then. Will you promise, dear?"

"If I must."

He took her in his arms and looked long into her eyes. She felt the deepening of the tide as her blood began to race.

"You promised, Gordon," she reminded him, in her low voice.

Her lips met his reluctantly. She was afraid of him because at last she was afraid of herself.

It seemed to her that he was drawing her soul and body to him through the lips. She wrenched herself away and ran into the open.

When Hilary followed she was cranking the car.

"We'll be just in time for breakfast," he told her after they were back in the main road.

She was grateful to him for carrying the conversation to the trifles of every-day life.

"I'm going to send for a doctor to look at your head."

"No need. It's all right."

"Still, I'm going to."

"You're the nurse. I'm only the patient," he surrendered.

It was not until they were rolling between the avenue of elms up to Red Holm that Hilary recurred to the personal issue.

"When am I going to see you . . . alone?"

"I'll let you know. Until then I don't want you to try to see me."

"Will it be long?"

"I don't know. . . . There's Dick on the steps."

Lambert threw away his cigarette and came forward sullenly.

"Found him, did you?"

"As you see," Daphne answered, following Hilary from the car.

"Where?"

"A few miles from here on the cañon road."

His suspicious glance went from one to another. "That so? Badly hurt, Hilary?"

"I got a nasty fall, but I'm all right now. Thanks to Mrs. Lambert."

"Funny she found you when none of the men could."

"Don't stand talking, Dick. Go and phone for the doctor," Daphne broke in impatiently.

"That's all right. I was only asking a civil question."

"Well, you've had a civil answer. Now please do as I say. Mr. Hilary has a bad cut."

"Maybe he'll learn to keep off Prince Rupert's back. You got off lucky. That horse has a devil in him. I ride him, but nobody else on this place ought to."

"That's what I've been telling Mr. Hilary." And to Flanders, who appeared at that moment: "Help Mr. Hilary to his room. He has had a fall that has shaken him up a good deal."

"It really is nothing," Gordon protested, as he was led away.

CHAPTER XIV

Daphne undressed, slipped into a kimono, and lay down on her bed to rest while she thought. It did not occur to her that she might fall asleep. She closed her eyes because when the surroundings were blotted out she could think more logically, and she wanted to see all sides of this question before she decided it.

The sun, beating into her face, awakened her at half past nine. She could scarcely believe that she had been asleep more than two hours, but she wasted no time in disputing the clock. Padding barefoot into the little private bathroom adjoining, she turned on the cold-water tap. Daphne had a good deal of the Spartan in her. Winter and summer she had her cold bath, prepared by herself and not by a maid. It gave her always the shock of sensuous delight that comes from the reaction of perfect health.

Free as a boy in her movements, she stepped drip-

ping from the bath a very symphony of rhythm. The melody of music flowed in her motion. Her nude young body, infinitely seductive in its fresh soft supple grace, expressed the harmony of her soul as adequately as does the still sea that of nature at early dawn when the flush of the new day is creeping over its bosom.

A brisk rubdown with a long towel drew a coral tide to the satin skin. Venus, glowing from her morning dip, never tingled with a more delicious joy in mere living. The blood sparkled in her tapering limbs. It sang in every quickened nerve. The flexible loveliness of her form showed in every undulation, in every exquisite poise as the muscles, padded in radiant flesh, swelled to new contours when she bent to dry herself.

At the first chance she slipped into a bath robe. One might have guessed that while she was conscious of her beauty and delighted in it her modesty shrank from an exposure of it even when alone.

Thirty minutes later she stepped down the stairway fresh as a lark. She was in an attractive silk house gown of very simple design but cut on the

perfect lines she insisted upon. Her abundant hair, dressed by her maid in twenty minutes, looked the finished product of hours. It was one of her characteristics that she never looked flurried or as if she had made a hurried toilet.

Miss Jimmie Dixon's fluty voice floated out to Daphne as she moved toward the dining room.

". . . and Mrs. Lambert found him, you say? How perfectly romantic! And *when* did she find him? And *where?* Do somebody tell me. I'm expiring of curiosity."

Miss Dixon's manner raised the whole episode at once to the rank of a near-scandal.

Antoinette cut in with wholesome sharpness: "Don't be foolish, Jimmie. She went out while you and I were asleep, and she looked after him and brought him in. *I* say she's a trump. Also, we happen to be her guests."

"Oh, of course, only I wondered——" Miss Jimmie stopped and grew very red in the face. Her hostess was looking at her quietly from across the table.

"I found Mr. Hilary between four and five o'clock

this morning about four miles from here on the cañon road," Daphne explained to her vis-à-vis as she seated herself. "He was just recovering from unconsciousness. I sponged his wounds, brought him home, and sent for a doctor. One doesn't like to spoil a romance, but I'm afraid there is nothing else to tell. . . . James, grapefruit, please."

Antoinette could have clapped her hands with glee. Three cool sentences had shattered Jimmie's near-scandal beyond hope of repair. That young woman, her face slightly more flushed than usual, murmured that she hoped Mr. Hilary was not badly hurt.

"I haven't heard," Daphne answered lightly. "I've been asleep ever since I got home. James, will you find out for Miss Dixon how Mr. Hilary is? I think Mr. Lambert will know."

"I didn't mean to make any trouble," Jimmie said meekly. "I just wondered how he was."

"It's no trouble. And I'm sure we'd all like to know." The faintest hint of amusement was discernible in Daphne's eyes as she added: "We're

anxious about your ankle, too, Miss Dixon. Does it pain you much this morning?"

Miss Jimmie did not take the question kindly, but she smiled politely. "Not much, thank you, dear Mrs. Lambert."

"And the swelling—has it gone down?"

"Almost entirely."

"And I suppose there is now no fever?"

"None."

"That's so good. Did you sleep well?"

"Very well, thank you."

The eyes of the two women met. Both of them were smiling outwardly, but behind the mask was a glitter that fell short of friendship. Jimmie Dixon knew that her hostess had suspicions about the sprain. She resented them, because they happened to be true. The injury to her ankle was a myth, invented by her on the spur of the moment as an effective enticement to snare Gordon Hilary.

Lambert sauntered in himself to answer Miss Dixon's question. The doctor had taken three stitches in the wound and pronounced that probably

Hilary would be all right after he had had a good sleep. At the present moment the invalid was having some sleep.

After breakfast Daphne went about her duties as usual. She had a talk with the overseer, bought a workhorse from a neighboring farmer, and sold three cows to a Brentford dairy. Also she rode down to the field known as the Plimford meadow to decide when the oats should be cut.

It was well on toward late afternoon before she found a chance to be alone. She did not intend to be in any hurry, for this was to be the most momentous decision of her life. It might take her a week to make up her mind. She might know before morning. In either case she wanted to be sure that it was not an impulse, or that she had been swayed by her feelings rather than by her reason. She knew already that this was the one great love that would come to her. What she wanted to make sure of was that its satisfaction would not run counter to duty.

Woman more than man has in her the capacity for renunciation. Daphne had given five years of

her existence in order not to shatter the happiness of another woman. But she was far too sane to enjoy sacrifice for its own sake. The urgent call of life had come to her. Now, if ever, she must fulfill herself, must come to the perfection of womanhood.

It was beside the question whether she would find happiness with Hilary. As she saw it now life with him—even to the limited extent they could share it together under the circumstances—would be a heaven on earth. Daphne knew this was not the common experience of lovers. Custom staled their delight in each other, made of their daily walk a humdrum duty instead of a keen joy. But if Life summoned her she must obey the call whatever the issue—to happiness if it might be, to misery if it must, but to her destiny certainly. All she had still to determine was whether the duty of renunciation still held its claim on her.

Though she was essentially a woman, feminine to the core, Daphne had not escaped the liberating tendencies of the age. There are those who never take their gloves off to take hold of life, who never

handle delicate subjects with freedom of mind. But so far as she could Daphne looked at things without the colored spectacles of convention.

The dictum of society is that a "good woman" is one who is virtuous in the sense of having observed the letter of the law as to sex relationships. She may be a liar, a betrayer of confidence, a slanderer, one of those devoted followers of Christ who are letter perfect in His teachings and yet have missed the whole spirit of His mission; still she wears the smug mantle of respectability so long as she has not been discovered breaking the seventh commandment. But let her slip once in this respect, no matter what the temptation or how grossly she has been betrayed, and she is cast out into the darkness of the damned.

Daphne was singularly pure-minded. She had an instinctive distaste for whatever was not clean and sweet. But she believed that no test of goodness based on a single quality was broad enough. A woman must be clean-minded, truthful, generous and brave, honorable in her affairs, kind to the unfortunate, ready to spend herself for those in need.

She must be full of love for all living creatures. Any one who could willfully hurt a child, an old man, or one of the down-trodden was not moral in any true sense. No matter what her conduct had been, a woman was good only if the spirit of love dominated her life. She might have been a great sinner—might still be one before the world—and yet be one of God's elect.

Conventions were mere husks. Daphne cared nothing for them except as conveniences. What she must find out was the principle of right that lay back of them. If she could determine this she believed she had the courage to follow wherever it might lead.

CHAPTER XV

James helped Miss Dixon to the hothouse strawberries as she ran her eyes through the morning mail.

"Mother writes I really must come home," she murmured aloud.

She had relied on Lambert to interpose an objection, but when none came Miss Jimmie glanced up in surprise. Dick had just been called to answer a telephone call.

"Must you go so soon?" Daphne asked politely.

"I've been away from home for a right long time. I reckon I must."

Jimmie had not had the least intention of going when she made the indiscreet remark about leaving. Now she glanced toward the telephone hurriedly, but Dick, busy with his party, did not catch the wireless call for relief. She looked at Antoinette, but that lady either did not or would not see the appeal for help.

"You've been away a long time. You'll be glad to get back, I suppose," Mrs. Bock said cruelly.

"Of course," Jimmie returned sweetly.

"Got to go myself to-morrow," Rosenbloom cut in cheerfully. "Had a bully time, Mrs. Lambert."

"Since the rest are going I think I must, too. The Merricks have been writing from Atlantic City," Antoinette explained. "But I do love it here, Mrs. Lambert."

"Then we may hope you'll come again . . . if you really must go so soon."

"I must. I promised myself to them three days ago—and kept putting it off."

Jimmie bit her lip. She had not intended to precipitate a breakup of the house party. She had enjoyed herself thoroughly. Red Holm was a delightful place to stop, and one could go home when there was no other available port in reach.

"You'll be the only guest left at Red Holm, Mr. Hilary," she drawled.

Hilary, who guessed that her claws were cut, was imperturbable.

"Got to start for New York to-day. And from

there I'll have to run down to Washington. Orders from the department just in on the mail."

"Oh! I thought you were on your vacation."

"Thought so myself. But it happens I'm needed for a consultation. Probably it will be only for a day or two."

"Then perhaps you may be back at Brentford—since you like it so well here," Jimmie murmured, slanting her innocent eyes at him.

By this time Dick was back at the table. His spoon hung poised over his grapefruit while he waited for the engineer's answer. The Westerner did not turn a hair.

"Likely enough. One can never tell," he replied easily.

"I presume New York and Washington are too large for the village cutup to show to advantage," she murmured, with lazy insolence.

Dick wakened up. "Eh, what's that? Let us all in, Miss Dixon."

"You'll have to get Mr. Hilary to tell you. It's really his joke, not mine."

Gordon flushed. Her audacity had got home

for once. He met her on the ground she had chosen.

"Am I to tell it all, Miss Dixon?"

She flashed one furious glance at him. "Please yourself, Mr. Hilary."

"Think I'll let it stay a private joke, then, one just between us two," he decided.

The conversation eased to less inflammable topics, but Jimmie Dixon simmered with anger. She was a woman scorned. He had refused what she had offered—the girl herself was not sure how much that had been—and ever since she had longed helplessly to punish him. But he seemed to wear a coat of mail impervious to her darts. The satiric shafts she threw bounded from him without damage, served only to show him how the slight rankled. No matter how she tried to make him wince, his good-natured indifference parried the thrusts.

Hilary, after breakfast, was telling Rosenbloom about a theatrical performance he had attended at Rio Janeiro. The Chicago manager, interested, asked questions. Lambert yawned elaborately behind his fingers.

Miss Dixon laughed derisively. "I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick: nobody marks you," she quoted, unable to repress her spite.

Quick as a flash Hilary countered. "What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you still living?"

Dick missed the point. He was not strong on Shakespeare. But Rosenbloom got it and could not help a smile. The retort had been apt.

Miss Jimmie left in time to catch the noon train. Dick drove her to town, but not to the station. All the way to Brentford Lambert besought her not to go home yet. Reluctantly she yielded to his entreaties and did what she had intended to do from the first. There was no use hurrying home. Just now the Brentford Arms suited her much better. A Mrs. Alleyne stopping there would give her the very limited chaperonage she needed, and Dick Lambert would see to it that she had a good time.

Lambert did not get back to Red Holm in time for luncheon. Rosenbloom and Antoinette disappeared for a stroll immediately after and left Hilary to knock billiard balls aimlessly about. He dared

not leave the house lest Daphne might send for him in his absence.

It had been three days since she had brought him back wounded from the accident. In that time he had not seen her for a moment by herself. But he felt sure she would give him a chance to-day, knowing as she did that he must leave by the night train.

After what seemed an interminable wait James handed him a note.

"Golfing lesson at 3.30 if convenient."

The initials D. L. were signed to the note.

He scrawled a line below:

"You've saved my life."

Hilary was content at first to walk beside her in silence and watch the soft loveliness of curved cheek and flowing lines. She was very grave and sweet to-day. He thought she carried herself with a gracious reticent dignity new even in his experience of her.

"Let us walk to the far green," she proposed. "I want to talk to you."

Whatever she had to say to him—and he knew it was important from her manner—waited while they tramped across the course. How silken strong she was! With what a resilient easy grace she moved! Had ever another woman such unconscious nobility of poise? He could not keep his eyes from her or his thoughts from worship.

They found a place to sit under the shade of a great pine. Even now she found a difficulty in beginning. A faint color was in the cheeks usually so clear. A pulse of excitement was beating in the white round throat. The eyes that met his steadily were brilliant as diamonds.

"I've asked you here to tell you something . . . Gordon, I've found the way out."

"From your cage?" He leaned forward tensely, his look fixed on her face.

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"Do you remember telling me the first time we met that there is too much waste in the world and that we ought to shape things along better lines?"

"Yes."

"Isn't that true especially in marriage relationships? Does not the chance of Motherhood die stillborn in thousands of noble women because our social system is so slipshod?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to reshape my life to better ends in spite of this blundering scheme of ours."

"How?"

"I'm going to live. Isn't that what we all want? Isn't it what we're here for?" She let her self-restraint go and for a moment was flung into quivering emotion. "Life! Life! God gave it me. They've taken it away. What do I care for their conventions and their petty little rules? It's my right to live . . . and I'm going to claim the right."

His blood began to throb. "You mean . . .?"

"I may have to pay the price. Perhaps I shall. But I'm going to know life in its fullness. Why was I made a woman, strong and young and sound, if all that womanhood means is to be denied me? The race pays too much for what it calls my virtue when it condemns me to sterility. Its losses and

mine are irreparable. . . . I'll let the world dictate to me no longer. I'm going to be free."

She threw out her arms in a gesture of splendid abandon. Her eyes looked through and beyond him. Hilary knew that she had a vision of little children in her arms, clinging to her skirts, nestling to her with the loving dependence of the helpless.

It was not necessary for her to tell him all her feeling in words. He had never known one of her sex so rich in the qualities that go to make an ideal mother. Were these to count for nothing? She was created to be a link between all the ages of the past and all the ages yet to come. Nature had made it possible through her to transmit the life of this planet at high-water mark. The lustrous hair, the buoyant tread, the sensitive face, the strong resilient body were the visible manifestations of a brave soul full of vital joy. Surely posterity had its claim on her perfect physique, on her love and courage and tenderness. The great spiritual task laid on her was to be fruitful.

Nor did Hilary doubt that the divine right of selecting a partner in her destiny had been com-

mitted to her. Morally she was not married, since there can be no true marriage without love. The man whose name she bore was impossible as a husband for her.

If she let the ghosts of dead conventions rule her —what then? Her splendor would fade. Her hair would fall out, her face grow wrinkled, her step drag. From a wasted womanhood she would go into old age having missed the glory of life.

"You mean that you are going to——?" He broke off his sentence unfinished. It was hard to phrase what he meant.

"I'm going to give myself to the man I love. I'm going to . . . let him be the father of my children . . . if God gives me any."

Into her face a tide of blood had beaten, but her eyes held to his without shame. In the poise of her head was the nobility of a fine sincerity and courage.

"You're going to do this . . . without a divorce?"

"Yes. There's Aimée. I can't ask for a divorce . . . not yet."

"But—have you thought what this means?"

"I've thought of nothing else since . . . since I found out that the way to our love is clear . . . that it will rob no other woman. It means going to my destiny, fulfilling the higher law . . . the law of Nature, decreed by God, written into our bodies and our souls from the beginning of time. It means that I'm going to do my work in the world . . . that I'll be no longer a traitor to my duty, to our love . . . to our unborn children. I'll pay to the world the service I owe, and so I'll stand justified before God and man of my life."

Hilary bowed his heart in tender humility before her magnificent audacity and single-mindedness. Never had he admired her so much. She had risen and stood before him deep-breasted and sumptuous, a potential mother of heroes, altogether the desirable mate of his dreams. He thought of the great women of history—Joan of Arc, Charlotte Corday, George Eliot—and he found her worthy a place beside them. But he saw before her a lifelong martyrdom, and he could not let her face it.

"You don't understand, Daphne. It's a brutal

world. You would be misunderstood . . . treated as a leper. Women not worthy to brush your shoes would throw mud at you. Good people would shun you."

"I'll have to take my chance of that. I'm willing to pay the price."

"It wouldn't be a chance, but a certainty. You would be marching straight to misery."

"If I were sure of that I couldn't do it, because it wouldn't be right . . . for the sake of the little ones that might come to us. We couldn't bring them into the world to bear its scorn. But my circumstances would protect them. I'm a married woman in the eyes of society. I could bear children without any stigma attaching to them."

"But . . . Lambert?"

"He would be furious with rage and jealousy, but he would never tell. His inordinate pride would keep him quiet. Besides, he wouldn't dare. If he breathed a word I would divorce him and cut him off without a dollar. I have proofs of his . . . affairs."

"Could you be sure of him?"

"Quite sure. He is tied to a life of ease and luxury. It has become second nature to him. Without my consent he would not have a dollar. And, of course, he has no earning capacity."

"No man would play so ignoble a part."

"Dick is not a man in any vital sense. I'll hold him to the contract. He shall not stop me from living my life."

Hilary shook his head. "The truth would leak out somehow. You would be suspected and an unjust envious world would punish."

She looked at him with the proud lift to the chin that showed the strong white throat column. "My dear, I'm not ashamed of my love. It is clean . . . and pure. Motherhood is the highest service I can give the world. Society can't punish one who doesn't accept its punishment. If its verdict is unjust, why should we fear it? There is nothing in life one need be afraid of except meanness and disloyalty and untruth in one's self. If we keep our love secret it is not because we think it a shameful thing. We do it only to spare . . . the little ones God may give us."

Her voice was wonderfully clear and low and tender. In every accent, in every movement of the body breathed the note of spiritual certainty. The calm courage of her convicted him of cowardice. But he knew that it was for her sake he trembled.

"In God's sight I shall be a wife and you a husband. If He lends His divine power to the gift of . . . little ones, giving them strong little bodies and brave clean minds, how dare I presume to discredit His work by believing my small share of it a sin?"

Hilary's eyes were crucibles of liquid steel. "Dear heart, I kiss the hem of your garment. You are such a woman as God makes only once in a generation. You would give yourself gladly, radiantly. But dare I take what you offer? What of to-morrow . . . and all the long to-morrows of life? How do I know that you are sure of the future? That as the years pass your point of view may not change? And what is done will be done . . . irrevocably."

"You must take your chance—as I do."

"Ah! But there's a difference. You take all the

risk . . . all the chance of loss and woe. I take only the joy. It's not a fair exchange."

She put her hands in his and looked long into his eyes, and it seemed as if her molten soul flowed into his so that the two were fused as one.

"It's the exchange I want, my husband. I go to my destiny. It is the lot of women to suffer. Why should I more than the rest hope to escape? Why should I desire it, since through pain comes the fuller life? Whether I elect to pass a sterile existence . . . or to go to a fruitful one . . . still I must endure grief. Better—far better—that I suffer the growing pains of life than the rheumatic ones that lead to decay. . . . Beloved, because I love you . . . with my whole soul . . . and trust you to the uttermost . . . I ask you to go with me . . . to the great adventure."

He set his jaw like a vise against the great surge of exultant desire that flooded his arteries. She had come to him with the divine generosity of a goddess out of heaven and made offer of the gift he most craved on earth. The lover in him sang a

hymn of rejoicing, but the saint in him still hedged her from his passion. The hour was striking when he must make decision, and he did not know what he ought to do. In any case he could not throw back in her face the pearls she brought with such splendid faith to him. Not for the world would he have hurt her fine sensibilities. Nor could he accept them until convinced her devotion would not wreck the young life he loved.

"Daphne . . . dear my heart . . . how can I open to you my very soul? I am yours to the bottom of my heart, a hundred times more yours because of to-day. But because you come first with me I daren't bring shipwreck to you. I must be sure . . . very, very sure. If we lived only for to-day . . . if there were no future, I should know what answer to make. But the years are before you. I must protect you against yourself . . . against your generosity . . . against your own splendid self-sacrifice."

"You mustn't protect me from living. That is why I am here—to give myself in service. I think of Stevenson's biting phrase. 'It was in his horo-

scope to be parsimonious of pain to himself, or of the chance of pain, even to the avoidance of any opportunity of pleasure.' We can't run away from life, dear."

He took a tortured step or two toward the green and back. Her gaze followed him, a man straight and strong and narrow-flanked, face and body purified and cleansed by hard work and right thinking. She knew he was no Puritan. He was free of mind as she was, as much master of his fate. That every nerve in him ached to receive her she was sure. And she honored him because the keen-edged passion was not so strong in him as the love that thought first of her ultimate good.

"Give me time, Daphne," he urged. "We must decide this right. I'll be away a week. Let me think it over during that time. Before I come back I'll know."

She nodded assent. "That is fair. I want you to see it as I do. Only . . ."

"Only . . ." he repeated.

There was the faintest quiver in her voice. "Don't be too fearful of the future. We make disaster pos-

sible by magnifying it. Remember this, dear. I'm asking you to help me fulfill my destiny."

He took her hand between his two and looked at her out of eyes cloudy with emotion. "Don't think I can't appreciate what you've done. I have your nobility enshrined in my heart. You've offered me the greatest honor you could give to any man . . . the chance to be the father of your unborn children."

"If God thinks I'm fit to have any," she amended softly.

He stooped and kissed the palms of her hands one after the other. Never had he seen a woman more fit for maternity. She had the physical endowment, together with the mental and the moral. There flashed before him a picture of her as a mother, deep-breasted as one of Correggio's Madonnas, sweet and serious and tender. Surely her sons would be strong and her daughters fair, both alike inheritors of her superb courage and spirit.

Daphne looked away at the distant hills as she spoke in a low voice. "I come to you and ask you to help me do my work in the world because . . . I love you and you love me . . . But there's

another reason. The father of my children—if I'm to have any—must be what you are, strong and brave and loyal. He must not be a drone, but a worker. But he must be a gentleman, too, clean to the marrow. Gordon . . ."

The words died on her lips, and by an effort she brought her eyes round to meet his.

"Yes, dear."

"If . . . there is anything I ought to know . . . about you . . . will you write it to me while you are away?"

"Yes. I'm like other men. I haven't been a saint . . . but there's nothing in my past too bad to tell you."

"No. Don't tell me what I do not need to know. I'm not curious . . . or jealous. And I don't want to be narrow or priggish. You're a man. I can guess the temptations you've had. What you are now is all that matters to me. But . . . I've got to know . . . if there's any reason why . . . why . . ."

He lifted her over the hard place. "Do you mean any reason why I ought not to be your husband?"

A hot flush had beat into her face. "No, I don't mean that. I love you . . . I trust you . . . and that is enough for you and me. But . . . it isn't enough for . . . the little lives that may be given me to shape and guard. Is there any reason why you . . . ought not to be their father? I must be sure that . . . that . . ."

". . . that nothing out of my past will rise to injure them?"

"Yes."

"You mean consequences of loose living?"

She nodded.

"I give you my word of honor, Daphne. I am clean."

"I knew it . . . I knew it. But I had to ask. Do you mind, Gordon?"

"Of course I don't. I'm glad my wife is a modern woman, with courage to face the facts of life, and not a sentimentalist."

She gave him her sweet shy smile. "Oh, Gordon! I love to hear you call me your wife."

Of a sudden the blood beat fiercely in his temples. Their eyes met in a long, steady gaze. One tense

stifling moment, a fierce drumming of the heart, and they were in each other's arms. The lips of the maid turned to the lips of the man as might those of a desert wanderer to water after many hours of thirst. They clung to his, drank rapturous joy from them, became the gateway of pulse-waves that deliriously flooded her. Line to line her warm limbs and soft torso melted into the contour of his. A sense of floating in rarefied space intoxicated her brain.

"I love you . . . I love you . . . I love you," she murmured.

"As I do you, my Queen and loved one!"

"I'll not let you go, Gordon. . . . You'll not take yourself away from me after I've come to you."

"Never. Somehow you're going to be mine. If not your way, then my way. Only give me time to make sure what is the right way, brave heart."

"Do you despise me because I love you so openly? Ought I to make a secret of it to you . . . keep you in doubt? Am I unwomanly? Will you think my love common and cheap?" She flung her

passionate questions at him turbulently, doubtful of herself and half ashamed.

"No, by God. Out of all the world you choose me as your lover. In doing that you ennoble me, take me out of the ranks of common men and give me patent of nobility. You give your love like the queen you are, greatly, lavishly, and I . . . I thank the gods for it."

They had been walking hand in hand in the clouds. Now, with the same good sense that was never long absent, she disengaged herself from him.

"We're just a little . . . histrionic to-day, aren't we? And more than a little rash. What if some one saw us?" she asked, with her merry smile tilted at him.

"I'm afraid that some one would die of envy," he retorted.

"Are you thinking of . . . Miss Dixon?"

He flung her roguish laughter back at her. "You know I'm not. The some one is of the masculine gender."

She curtsied. "Thank you, sir, for the compli-

ment." She added, more soberly: "But some one *might* have seen."

"No. We are in a saddle between two little hills. For a million years nature has been making it a lovers' lane for us."

"Oh, you're incurably romantic to-day." None the less her eyes were warm for his folly.

"Not only to-day, but all days. And that reminds me . . . when am I going to see you alone to say good-by?"

They were walking now across the links toward the house.

"We've said it," she answered briskly.

"Oh, but—I didn't know we were saying good-by. That's not fair. It doesn't count."

"Doesn't it?"

"Of course it doesn't."

"I think we'll let it count." A ripple of amusement swelled her throat. "You've done enough lovemaking in one day for a man who isn't sure whether he wants the lady or not."

He could not deny her hit, nor could he quite let it go. "You do understand, don't you, Daphne?"

"Some things," she admitted modestly.

"I mean the reason why I . . . hang back. I can't reach for my happiness so roughly as to crush you in getting it. If I . . . cared less for you I might do differently."

"I know, dear boy," she murmured softly. "I was only joking."

"I knew you were. . . . You'll write to me while I'm away?"

"Yes."

"I don't want to leave you for an hour. But it will be good for us. We'll have time to decide what is best."

"I've decided already . . . for my part."

"Then you'll have time to change your mind."

They made a pretense of playing the course. Occasionally they went at it zealously. But their interest was intermittent and had to be spurred. They were too full of each other to care anything about the game.

In the hall they parted, she to dress for dinner and he to pack his belongings. Afterward he said good-by to her in the presence of Rosenbloom and Antoinette. Flanders drove him to the station.

CHAPTER XVI

Hilary's telegram announcing his return had preceded him nearly twelve hours. In it he had urged Daphne to give him an appointment as soon as she could. He found waiting for him at his Brentford hotel a note, characteristic of her in its pointed brevity.

"This evening at the cañon cottage."

A fine, misty rain had been falling all afternoon, and the sky was still full of it when Gordon stepped out from the suburbs along the muddy roads between the open fields. A soft, lovely haze was in the atmosphere, so that the meadows reminded him of a line from Rossetti: "The empty pastures blind with rain."

The evening recalled to him that first one when he had met Daphne. They had traveled far since then, so far that the clock could not be set back for

them. He was going to meet her with mixed emotions. An exultant pleasure buoyed him, but he felt, too, an odd uncertainty. There had been a note of reserve in her letters. The return to pick up a near relationship after an absence always carries with it the element of doubt. He had been gone only two weeks, but it was possible she might in that time have escaped to regions remote from him. Always he had sensed in her the capacity for moods that goes with temperament. She was fire, and a flame, and again the cool shadow of ferns. Now a bird's song rippled from her heart. Now the tragic note of woman's inescapable lot.

She did not come to meet him as once she had done. When she opened to his knock he saw in her bearing, felt in the cadence of her voice, that the barriers were up between them. The touch of her lips was reticent and cool. If she felt any strong emotion the curb on her impulse was tight.

Hilary himself was greatly moved. Her light tread, the rise and fall of her voice, the turn of her dear head, all drew on his emotion. She was in a cream-colored dressing gown, open in front so that

beneath it he could see the white garment that sheathed her supple body. Her lips were crimson roses, her eyes pools of light. Surely she was a woman to take captive the imagination. His heart beat fast. How near to him she was, and yet how far. Her sweet austerity set a barrier between them. The outstanding note of her loveliness was purity. She was a free woman, who had escaped from the cant and hypocrisy and conventions that kill. So much he could tell from the poise of the gallant little head. But she had not yet wandered far from the chrysalis of girlish innocence. Something of fine modesty in her, not to be phrased, but undeniably present, expressed a soul immaculate and radiant, still tinted with the lights of dawn. Her lover felt the overpowering impulse to stand between her and trouble as long as there was a drop of fighting blood left in his arteries.

They spoke in commonplaces, with little awkward silences in their talk.

"You have had a good trip?"

"Yes. Everything was all right. My work has been approved."

"That is good."

"I'm to be sent back to finish the project as soon as my vacation is over."

"I'm glad it all worked out as you hoped."

"Yes."

For almost the first time since she had known him she could think of nothing to say. She was annoyed at the embarrassment which had stolen the small talk her mind sought for desperately. What would he think of her gaucherie? She was behaving like a schoolgirl caught by the principal at a midnight spread.

"Won't you . . . sit down?"

To bridge the gap he detailed to her incidents of his trip. They compared notes on New York and Washington, not because the subjects interested them, but to keep away from the theme that was in the back of both their minds.

Daphne had done what she believed to be right in making her offer of love to Gordon, but already she had paid for her courage a hundred times. She could not think of that afternoon on the links without a wave of hot shame suffusing her. Her reason

told her she was justified, but something deeper than her mind—the world-old instinct of her sex for subterfuge, for sinuous indirection in treading the path of its destiny—whispered to her that she had been unfeminine. At bottom she felt that this was weakness, a survival of the coquetry that had always made a pretense of holding off the desired mate for the sake of appearances. But she was tortured none the less for fear she might have lowered herself in her lover's esteem.

The very possibility of this made her more reticent. In spite of herself she was a little stiff toward him. She had offered to make him partner in the fulfillment of her life, but she could not help bracing herself against the chance that he might have decided to reject the gift she wished to make. He could not realize what it had cost her to make this suggestion, involving so great a sacrifice.

"I had a line from Mrs. Bock this morning. She is having a delightful time. Her marriage is to be in the fall." Daphne had seized on the topic in desperation to make conversation, but somehow

even this alien matter had brought her direct to the point she instinctively avoided.

"She always manages to enjoy herself. It is her temperament to be sunny."

"Yes. Antoinette makes the best of things."

Presently they came again to a full stop.

Then, out of the darkness somewhere, a mocking bird dropped his song of love. It let loose pent-up emotions. Hilary's arms opened wide to her.

"Oh, my love . . . my love!"

To mistake the meaning of that cry was impossible. Such a flush as creeps over a snowy peak at sunset tinted the pallor of her face and throat. Trembling, she came shyly to him.

"I didn't know. . . . I thought maybe. . . . I didn't know," she murmured.

He understood all that she could not put into words. Her sweet confession charmed him. Was there ever another woman like her? His heart was warm with tenderness. She was his sweetheart, but she was, too, a maiden looking timorously at him with a certain awe of what this man who was to be her husband was like.

In both the tide of emotion swelled full.

"At last," he cried softly.

"You . . . are sure?" In the tense stillness, broken only by their low breathing, the words were barely audible to him.

"Yes. . . . A hundred times yes, my sweetheart . . . my queen of heaven."

"But I . . . asked you. I . . . made love to you."

"I thank the gods for it. No memory in life is so dear to me as that knowledge," he exulted.

"I've cried over it . . . every night almost," she confessed. "I had to say it, but . . . you don't despise me for it, do you?"

She was weeping softly in his arms, even while he kissed the tears away.

"I couldn't, and still be worthy of you. No woman I have ever known is so good and true and brave as you. Did one of her soldiers despise Joan of Arc, dear? I glory in you with all my soul, dear heart."

"I . . . was afraid . . . that maybe you might think me . . . bold."

"Oh, Daphne, you of little faith," he chided gently.

"It was different when you weren't here," she told him. "I wasn't afraid when I could look into your eyes and see you smile. But with you two thousand miles away, your mind on business things that drove me from you. . . . I wasn't sure."

"They didn't drive you from me. At all the appointments I held with my chief you were present, a little smiling ghost of you hovering in the background. I used to hurry through the day's work so that I could get a horse and ride up the Potomac where I would be alone with you. Sometimes, when it was very still, I could hear your voice and almost touch your soft cheeks."

"I love to hear you say it, Gordon dear," she sighed contentedly. "It was that way with me, too. When I wanted to be very sure of you I would go down to our Forest of Arden and keep perfectly still. Then I could hear you laugh and talk and see you come striding over the hill to me."

"You darling," he cried, and kissed her.

She poured her heart out to him in broken sen-

tences. "There has never been another man in my life . . . not one. I love you beyond words. But if that had been all, I couldn't have told you the things I did. It was not to . . . my lover . . . that I told them, but to . . . ."

He whispered in her ear the words she had not dared speak. "To the man who was to be the father of your child. I understand, sweetheart."

"To him I had the right to speak. It ought to be every woman's privilege . . . yes, and her duty . . . to choose him. I believe that, Gordon."

"You've made me see it, too. I love you more because of your devotion to the truth you see."

She drew a happy breath and nestled closer to him. "I'm only a girl, dear—just like other girls. I'm not like you think I am . . . brave and strong."

"Whatever you are you're the woman I love. I'll not argue the type so long as we're 'imparadised in one another's arms.' "

He led her to a lounge and sat down beside her. They talked, disjointedly, as lovers will till the end

of time, with little kisses scattered here and there when impulse moved them. No tempered happiness was theirs. Life clamored in them, sweet, tumultuous. He looked at her, shy and slender, fragrant and warm, and it came to him to marvel at the good fortune that had brought his craft across the rough, uncharted waters safe to port with hers.

They passed from one phase to another of the wonder that had crowned their lives. Now the note that dominated them was the one of lovers' rhapsody. Their spirits glowed. They trod the mountain tops of ecstasy. They passed to whispered confessions, sweet confidences, murmured hopes and plans. The long battle was ended at last for both of them. They rested happily, knowing the difficulties before them, glad that they were to face them together, but for the moment sober in their joy.

Each knew that there would never be another hour just like this in their lives. There would be others, as full of joy, as vital. But the mystery of each other would never again take such entire possession of them. For the shadow of that moment

was reaching toward them when she would become wife instead of maid.

All that was good in Hilary rose within him in solemn warning. He prayed to his pagan gods to help him make her happy. In taking her he knew he accepted the greatest responsibility of his life. In spite of her five and twenty years she was in many ways still a girl at heart. It would be his part so to guide her over life's rough places that she might never lose the bloom of her unconquered youth. Till now she had been captain of her own soul, but from this hour he would be master of her happiness. Her tears, her laughter, her joy and her sorrow, would be dependent upon him. The certainty of this made his heart very tender toward her. Like fine tendrils his impulses and desires went out to enwrap her from the woes of the world, to shield and protect her from harm.

From out of the night strange sweet music trembled. From out of the night throbbed again the love lilt of the mocking bird. It was his hour of consecration. She seemed to him the embodiment of divine maidenhood, of its suppleness, its fresh

"IT IS THE MOST SOLEMN HOUR OF MY LIFE."

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softness of young flesh, above all of its unsullied purity.

She looked at him shyly, wondering what were his thoughts. Not even on that night when he had stumbled down Old Baldy through the rain to her had he seemed more a stranger.

"You are . . . serious," she whispered.

"It's the most solemn hour of my life."

"I know . . . I know. But love will make the way plain, won't it?"

He tried to quell his doubts. "If I could only be sure."

CHAPTER XVII

Daphne lay stretched in her Forest of Arden among the ferns. Her hand rested on a copy of Dante, but she was not reading. Lying on her back, forearm doubled under her neck, she showed the length of throat, the litheness of limb, and the sinuousness of form characteristic of one of Rossetti's women.

Through her mind floated lazily snatches of colored imagery. Her lover had been with her last night. In those swift moments emotion had been paramount. But the world in which she had her being this morning was one of twilight stillness. At most only hushed whisperings, echoes of suspended life, penetrated to her senses. Her eyes were a little heavy, her limbs weary with the languor ensuant on spent passion. A laggard pulse told of vitality below par. The lassitude of dreams, of vague yearnings and inarticulate desires, hung over her. She was in the land of the lotus eaters, where

the air was drowsy with the perfume of the pines and the dark moisture of lush ferns.

It had been a month now since her prince had given the magic kiss that waked her from maidenhood, since she had arisen and followed her destiny. She had been very happy and had regretted nothing. Love had lost none of its glamour to her. Gordon Hilary was still the one man she would have chosen for a husband, for the father of her unborn children. With him she had shared hours of ecstasy, in which her spirit had flown to heaven. Never had there been an instant of discord between them. But she felt already that in their relationship was a lack of finality. Soon he must go back to his work in the desert, and she could not go with him. That was part of the tragedy of their equivocal situation.

A line of Browning sang itself in her brain:

> "With their triumphs and their glories and the rest,
> Love is best!"

Yes, love was best, but she realized already that she would have to pay heavily for hers. By nature

she was open and clear as a June day. She had a deep scorn for a lie, for meanness, for subterfuge. Now her life was honeycombed with these. It was all very well to tell herself that the end justified the means, but, oh! how she hated the false little explanations into which she had been forced. Had it not been for Aimée and for the children that might come of their love she would a hunded times rather have stepped into the open and taken the buffets of the world. But these considerations rose like a hedge of thorns in front of her. She had escaped from one cage only to fly into another.

Daphne had been reading the "Inferno," and a passage in the fifth canto had caught her attention:

"One day
For our delight we read of Launcelot,
How him love thralled. Alone we were, and no
Suspicion near us. Oft times by that reading
Our eyes were drawn together, and the hue
Fled from our altered cheek. But at one point
Alone we fell. When of that smile we read,
The wicked smile so rapturously kiss'd
By one so deep in love, then he, who ne'er
From me shall separate, at once my lips
All trembling kiss'd."

She remembered how Rossetti had shown the souls of the lovers clasped in each other's arms as they floated in the flames of hell. The similarity of the story to her own stayed insistently with her. Lanciotto, the betrayed husband, upon discovering the guilty passion, had put to death Francesca and his own brother Paolo for the wrong they had done him.

Daphne did not for a moment admit that the cases were parallel. Her love for Gordon was pure. In God's sight they were husband and wife. Only the technical formalism of a warped society stood between them. Nor could she conceive of Dick Lambert taking so drastic a revenge. It was not in him to face a crisis without weakening. But, after all, she could not quite escape a certain uneasiness that ought to go only with guilt.

The world has traveled a long way since Dante's time, but at bottom right and wrong were still the same. She believed she had done right, and yet in a hundred ways she suffered just as if her choice had been a guilty one. Was it the Puritan in her still struggling for life?

After all, marriage is a safeguard—the reasonable finale. Daphne felt that it stands for stability, the fireside, candor, children, and so for an anchored happiness. It was absurd, she told herself, but . . . she would have given all her material possessions on earth for that piece of paper which stands as a symbol of the world's approval of the love of man and woman.

There came to her the grating of a shoe on the pebbly beach of the brook. Some one had crossed on the stepping stones and was coming up the bank toward her. Her first thought was that it must be Hilary; her second that this tread was not so strong as his. Quickly she sat up. Dick Lambert pushed through the ferns to her.

"So you're here," he said sulkily.

"I do seem to be," she answered. A shadow of inscrutability had fallen over her face. A steely mask filmed her eyes and hardened her mouth.

"Not expecting me, I suppose?"

It seemed to her that there was a look of derisive malice in the sneer with which he regarded her. Her cheeks were colorless, but there was no sugges-

tion of fear in the delicate disdainful poise of her head.

"No."

"Well, I've come to have a talk with you. I want to know just where we're at in regard to that desert ass Hilary."

"Subject taboo," she answered quietly, her eyes steadily on him.

"Guess again," he came back insolently. "You can't put that across any more. Now that you're carrying on an affair under the rose you can't come the high and mighty on me."

"Have you come here to insult me?"

The dark blood of anger was in his face. "To tell you the truth. Think I'm blind? Think I haven't got sense enough to come in out of the rain? He's been coming here to see you, I say."

"Has he?"

"You love him. Don't deny it," he burst out.

Daphne was no longer in the land of the lotus eater, but very much an alert young woman of the twentieth century. Even in her voice there was a metallic edge usually quite foreign to it.

She laughed with gentle irony. "You're going to reform, then, I take it."

"Never mind about me. We're discussing you. Unless you send this man away there will be trouble."

"Trouble for—whom?" she asked.

"For you. I'll not stand it. You don't even deny that he is your lover."

"No. I deny nothing. I refuse to let you interfere in the matter. I'll not tolerate the attitude you have assumed lately."

The impotent anger in him boiled. "What do you take me for, Daphne? I'm not the dirt beneath your feet even if I am your husband. I'll not stand any longer the treatment I've had."

"Then take your legal remedy," she advised. "See what you can make of it. But remember if you move one step or if you so much as murmur a scandal about me you'll never get another penny from me. Not—another—penny, Dick."

Her eyes had the stab of a dagger. He knew she would keep her word, and his courage blanched at the prospect. Jimmie Dixon had spurred him to this

protest by stirring again his jealousy of Hilary, but he knew in his heart that he dared not see it out to a fighting finish. Any amount of evidence could be collected against him, and no court would decide a case in his favor against Daphne on the suspicions he would have to offer instead of evidence.

"I'll see your friend, Mr. Hilary. If he has any respect for you—if he doesn't count you the same as his mistress, he'll stay away."

She looked at him with a kind of noble anger, the chin lifted from her white throat.

"Don't ever speak to me again, sir. Don't ever come to Red Holm or I'll have you thrown out. Your remittances will come to you through my lawyer."

Lambert knew he had gone too far and began to repudiate the indignity he had offered.

"Of course I don't mean that, Daphne. I was angry at you. No wonder. You drive a fellow crazy with your treatment." She had turned away and he was following her like a cur with its tail between its legs. "I apologize for what I said. I know you've just taken a fancy to this man. That's

all. But folks will get to talking. I wouldn't be your friend if I didn't warn you."

She pushed on swiftly, her heart burning with furious anger at him. Waves of disgust surged through her. And running like a fine thread through the warp of her emotion was a cold fear. Hilary's mistress! Would people say that of her if they knew? Of course they would. She had deliberately taken the risk of it, believing that her love was above the reach of such whisperings. But would Hilary come some day to think of it that way himself? Would he ever feel that she was a chain that bound him to dead joys? Would she ever come to be to him something merely to gratify his physical passions instead of a dear friend to whom his spirit ran out gladly every day of his life? Not once before had such a thought occurred to her. With her this was for life. She had taken it for granted that he, too, would always love her above other women. But—his mistress! It had an ugly sordid sound. Men tired of mistresses, she knew. Heaven help her if Gordon Hilary was not

pure gold, and she to him the one woman that his soul craved out of a world of beautiful women.

Dick's whimpering protests she scarce heard. Straight across the russet hill she went toward the other grove, pushed on to the house, and shut the door after her in Dick's face.

That young man treated his discomfiture as he did most unpleasant things. He cursed inaudibly—her, Hilary, himself, and lastly Jimmie Dixon, who had led him to such an asinine course.

He cursed Jimmie frequently these days when he was alone. She was leading him the devil of a chase, the little minx. He could spend all the money on her he wanted to, could have as much of her company as he chose so long as he was giving her a good time. She let him make love to her occasionally, and once or twice had flung herself on him with a flushed passion that intoxicated his vanity. But as yet she had not surrendered herself to his desire. Was she, after all, one of those flirts who stepped to the edge of license and then drew back? He knew she had been engaged a good many

times according to the fashion of some girls. But surely she had not the lips of Rossetti's "The Beloved" for nothing. And there was always that impalpable shadow over her that spoke of forbidden knowledge learned by eating of the tree.

But in his way he was a master of the art of seduction. His good looks, his prodigality, the experience he had in it, all helped to give him the manner of Prince Charming. Women found it easy to fall in love with him. During the past few days Jimmie Dixon had been a little gentler, a little softer in her manner to him. Once or twice his eyes had met hers and made the cheeks burn beneath them. She had been as piquant as ever, as tantalizingly audacious in her pouting red-lipped fashion, but the flame in the gaze which he had surprised spoke of banked fires within. His knowledge of women told him that her emotions were hurrying to a climax.

CHAPTER XVIII

When Jimmie Dixon could not get what she wanted she took what she could get. Her people were not very well off and she had been used to makeshifts. For that reason she had found it easy to transfer her sultry interest from Hilary to Dick.

Moreover, she was under obligations to Lambert. One of those women who are the slaves of luxury, she found herself continually cramped for the lack of funds. Just now this was particularly annoying. She did not want to go back to her dull little home for the rest of the summer, but she had already spent the allowance for vacation expenses her people felt able to afford. Dick was so freehanded that when with him there was no occasion to spend money, yet she was uncomfortably aware that her purse was almost empty and that her bill at the hotel had run so high that she could not [illegible] her if she wanted to go.

Somehow she must raise the wind. As her mind ran over the friends who might help her the outlook was not encouraging. More than one of them had already come to her aid. Antoinette Bock was one of these. She believed that if Antoinette had been on the ground she would have helped her, but they had not been very friendly at their parting and it would be just like her to ignore a letter. Dick Lambert was her only available asset. He had already loaned her money, a small sum, and she had repaid it. Now she would have to get enough out of him to put her on easy street.

To do her justice, she hated having to take his money. As she stood waiting for him on the porch of the hotel, drawing on her motoring gauntlets, she longed to be in such a position that she could regulate her life according to her pleasure. Why was it that some women—Daphne Lambert, for instance—had everything in the world while others had nothing?

A car swept up the driveway and Dick descended from it.

"Ready?"

She nodded brightly, banishing care from the surface at least.

He helped her into the seat beside the driver and resumed the wheel.

"Where are we going to-day?" she asked presently.

Dick smiled at her. She was leaning back among the cushions with all the sensuous delight of a kitten which has found a soft berth. From her piquant face eyes bright as sapphires smiled back into his.

"Did you ever hear of Beaumont? It's about eighty miles from here. We'll eat dinner at the most charming inn you ever saw. One feature of it is a maze where lovers get lost. The man who constructed it deserves the thanks of hundreds."

"Sounds right interesting," she said lazily.

A man on a motor cycle swept round the car and chugged forward along the road in front of them. He wore goggles and a gray sweater.

"I'm going to take you into that maze and [illegible] you there."

"Alone?" she asked carelessly, but her [illegible] eyes flashed a swift question at him.

"Alone . . . with me."

For years she had skirted the edge of danger and escaped by a hair's breadth. Some instinct told her now that peril had never been more imminent. If she drifted with the tide she would get beyond her depth. But it was her nature to take chances. Vanity and a desire for excitement drove her to the erotic adventure, just as Daphne had been driven by the far nobler passion to fulfill through love her creative powers.

"If I'm with you I shan't be lost," Jimmie retorted lightly.

"You'll be lost to the world . . . for the time."

"Oh! To the world." She pushed the point home. "And what will be the good of that?"

"As if you didn't know that I happen to be in love with you."

She sighed. "Ah! You say so."

"And I mean it."

"Do you?"

"You know I do." He glanced at her in surprise.

A pensive melancholy seemed to have claimed her. "What's the row, Jimmie?"

"Oh, nothing."

"You're worried about something. Let's have it."

"No-o. Not now, anyhow.'

"Little girls ought to go to their friends when they are in trouble," he told her.

"Little girls don't like to annoy their friends."

"What's a friend for?"

Her hand darted forward and rested for a moment on his. "You are a good friend, Dick, but that's no reason for imposing on you."

"Don't wrap it up that way, Jimmie. I'm at your service. You know it. . . . Are you worried about—finances?"

She looked away, as if embarrassed. "Maybe I'll tell you . . . while we're at dinner."

"I claim that for a promise. Remember."

An hour later they passed the cyclist in the gray sweater. He was sitting at a point where branched and was tinkering with the m his motor. Apparently he got it to wo

for the cycle flashed down the road just as Dick was helping Miss Dixon from the car in front of the inn at Beaumont.

Jimmie had brought a suitcase with her, and she dressed for dinner in the room that had been reserved for her by telephone. They dined in a private room modeled after the style of one in an old English tavern. Highly colored prints of hunting scenes decorated the walls. The lattices of the dormer windows opened upon an old-fashioned garden of hollyhocks and fuchsias and lavenders and feverfews. From the end of this a gate led into the famous maze. Just behind the hedge a full moon was rising.

The girl sighed. "It's lovely as a picture."

Dick's eyes were glittering already. She was in a satiny empire gown, cut low to show her perfectly modeled back and neck. The soft tapering arms were bare to the dimpled elbows. Dark hair, of the texture of corn silk, parted over the low forehead and waved back in ripples to shadow the dainty ears. To-night a warmer tint glowed through the olive of her cheeks, giving her piquant prettiness

an effect of brilliancy. Milady was somehow both sumptuous and delicate. The very deliberation of her motions, the little drawl in her voice, completed the suggestion of voluptuous ripeness. The remote depths of the fine eyes enhanced her charm by the hint of inaccessibility. Lambert could not look at her with unfluttered pulses.

"It's the beautiful frame I have provided for a more beautiful picture," he told her as he bowed over her hand to kiss it.

She dropped him a curtsey. "Thanks, my lord."

Dick had brought his own wine and they dallied over dinner in the luxurious way she liked. She was at her most alluring best, now dreamy and wistful with the depths of the still sea in her unfathomable eyes, now vibrant and beguiling, the charm of the Southland in every word and gesture.

It was not until he had lit her cigarette and she his that he recurred to the promise made earlier in the day.

The black curling lashes fluttered to her cheeks. "Dick, I . . . I've been a fool."

"That's not fatal. I'm various kinds of an ass myself."

"I've got myself in a mess. I . . . I owe a lot of money."

He grinned. "Give you two to one you don't owe a tenth as much as I do."

"But . . . I can't pay."

"Neither can I," shrugged Lambert. "What's the dif? Let 'em wait."

"Mine won't wait, all of them. There's my hotel bill. I've just *got* to pay that."

"How much?"

She guessed at it, hesitatingly.

He drummed with his fingers on the table. "If I weren't so devilishly hard up just now——" Something in her face warned him. "Of course I'll see you through, little girl. I'm not considering that question. But it 'll be deuced hard to dig up the needful. Daphne and I are on the outs just now. Don't you worry, though. The Jews will always do another little bill."

She gave a little sigh of relief. "You're the *best* friend." Moved apparently by impulsive gratitude,

she got up, came around the table, and put her arms about his neck. Her lips touched lightly first one of his cheeks, then the other.

"You dear boy! It's a shame to burden you with my troubles, but you're the kindest, most chivalrous friend ever a poor girl had."

"Nothing of the kind," he protested in a glow of satisfied vanity. "But—well, there isn't much I wouldn't do for you, Jimmie."

"I believe you do like me," she murmured with a little laugh. "And I like you, too, Dickie boy, I most certainly do."

"Like is a tepid word. Is it the best you can use?"

"I'll give you a bear hug to thank you. Will that do?" And for an instant she held his head tightly in her arms.

"I think a lot of you, dear. I don't know what I would do without you," he told her.

She struck a match and lit another cigarette for him. "I want to ask you a question, Dick. Will you answer truly true?"

"Yes."

"What will you think of me if I take your money?"

Basking as he was in the glow of his own vicarious generosity, her concern seemed to him delightful with its hint of anxiety.

"I'll think that you're the woman I love . . . and mean to make my wife some day."

"Oh, some day! That's a safe thing to say, since you're already married."

"Maybe we'll get over that hurdle soon."

She looked at him quickly. "What do you mean?"

"Daphne said something the other day that showed me she has been thinking about asking for a divorce. It wasn't very definite, but . . . Of course we'll have to come to it. She and I can't go on like this. There's nothing in the way now except the mater. Daphne has a foolish notion it would kill mother. From what she said, I think she'd be reasonable about a settlement. She never was a tight wad."

Miss Dixon said nothing. She was considering the possibilities swiftly. Her interest in Dick had

quickened in the past weeks. But she was quite well aware that love and marriage do not always wear the same shoes. Dick had not the qualities that go to make a good husband. He was inconstant, restless, vain. He had showed no capacity for making money. On the other hand, their tastes were similar. He had the surface attributes a woman likes—good temper, gayety, deference in little things. She would have to overlook a good deal, but that was the lot of most women and had been since the world began.

"If I can pull it off, will you trot in double harness with me, Jimmie?"

She looked at him steadily, as if she were weighing him and the things he represented. "I don't know, Dick."

"We've always hit it off tremendously well. You know you're fond of me, you little flirt."

"Oh, I like you."

"Since you both like and love me, what else is there to consider?"

"I didn't say I loved you, Mr. Conceit. You do sure enough take a heap for granted."

Her roguish smile tantalized and allured him. How much, after all, did she care?

He drank a glass of champagne gloomily. "I believe you're a flirt."

"Then there are a pair of us," she laughed.

"I'm not," he protested. "I've never had a chance to play fair yet. You *do* love me, don't you, Jimmie?"

"I love ever so many things that aren't good for me, but I don't always indulge myself."

"You usually do."

She nodded an admission of his point. "Yes, I get rid of my temptations by yielding to them. But the trouble is that I wouldn't get rid of you if I married you. I'd have you on my hands."

"Why shouldn't you, if you want me?"

"You're such an uncertain quantity, sir. I'd never be right sure of you."

"That's a good one—and you the most uncertain quantity ever a man fell in love with."

"It's your disposition to want what you can't get. After you have it, you don't want it."

"If you mean Daphne——"

"I don't mean her. She doesn't come under the conditions I mentioned. The rule is true, however."

"That just shows you don't understand me."

"Does it?" She slanted a smile at him. "I understand you too well. That's just the trouble."

"You always treat me as if I were a child, except when you want me to do something for you," he answered sulkily.

She perched herself on the arm of his chair, and rumpled his dark locks. "This is where Mr. Richard Lambert gets a chance to apologize."

"That's all right, but you know very well it's true," he grumbled.

"If you're quite sure you mean that, Dick, I'll have to thank you for your kind offer to help me in the matter of a loan and decline to accept it," she told him quietly.

"Oh pshaw!" He got up and moved impatiently up and down the room. "No use getting annoyed about it. I'm the one that has a right to complain. I'm not a kid and you've got no right to treat me like one."

Her eyes met his with a shy little appeal in them. "Are we quarreling, Dick?"

He stopped in his stride. "I believe we are, little sweetheart. I say, let's quit it. Of course I didn't mean what I said. I believe I *am* a good deal of a kid."

"You're a kid I like heaps and heaps," she made amends by saying.

His eyes warmed. "That's the way I like to hear you talk."

There were moments when the innocent unspoiled child she had once been still breathed in her heart. Usually it had to struggle for life, a pale and wan ghost of its once healthy self. For her education had made her a coquette incarnate, a beguiler of mankind, whose dewy glances were fraught with hidden purpose.

Now, flushed with elation at having escaped the vexation of her financial difficulties, she set herself to dazzle him with her charm. The gay smile came and went like rippling sunshine as it filters through moving foliage. There was about her a franker intimacy than he had before known. He felt that

his star was in the ascendent and his spirits rose. Surely he was a devil of a fellow, irresistible with women. There had never been one he could not make care for him—except Daphne. And even she had once been fond of him. Now she was the exception that emphasized the rule.

But as the excitement of the encounter grew in her Jimmie became more than mere coquette. The Eve in her—a modern highly developed Eve of the pampered twentieth century to be sure—predominated over the Delilah. She was whipping her own feelings into life as well as his.

Dick filled two glasses. He gave her one and took the other. His hand trembled.

"I give you a toast, darling." His eyes held hers while he voiced it. "To our love . . . and all the joys that will come of it."

Her glance wavered, fell, struggled up to meet his again. What did he mean? Was he speaking of their marriage after he should be free? From her eyes leaped a flame, clouded, quick with emotion and burning with a fierce, vivid intensity.

He waited imperiously for her to join him.

She lifted her glass. The bubbling liquid spilled from the shaking goblet upon her gown.

"Drink," he jubilantly ordered.

"To our love," she murmured.

"Go on."

"And the happiness that shall come of it."

He scoffed at her word. "Who said anything about happiness? That's a tame word. It's for humdrum everyday folks. I drink to the dear delights that shall be ours when we belong, Mrs. Lambert that is to be."

"I prefer my own phrasing, sir."

She touched the champagne with her lips, set the glass down, and sprang to her feet. "How warm this room is—and what a night it is. Come. Take me into the garden."

He knew she was evading him, but he nodded. Catching up a cloak, he threw it over her shoulders, and led the way to the garden. As they passed down the porch she could almost have touched with outstretched hand a man in a gray sweater tinkering at a motorcycle. She was not aware that he even existed.

They sauntered slowly through the garden, breathing the perfume of roses and honeysuckle and sweet peas. It was such a night as lovers have sighed for since the days of Eden, soft and languorous as those of Jimmie's own Southland, with no touch of the chill which was usual on the roof of the continent. Beaumont lay in a pocket at the edge of the mountains. It appeared as if the great hills took their roots almost at the fence back of the inn, but in this magic atmosphere they had lost the sharp detail of day and become softened to a violet-blue haze just a shade darker than the sky into which the summits melted.

The girl drew a deep breath of pleasure. She was alive to all forms of sensuous beauty. It was good to be a part of such loveliness.

"I thought I had seen your country, but this is the best yet," she told Dick softly.

"Thought you'd like it. This is the pergola."

Through the vines that formed the roof of the pergola a thousand stars and a young moon shone down. The beams of the latter filtered through and covered the floor with a fretwork of soft light. In

that beautiful night, under so perfect a sky of stars, no more romantic setting for a love story could have been devised.

Jimmie Dixon felt her blood beat in rhythmic harmony with the night.

Dick spread his overcoat on the bench to save her dress, and she sat down, gathering her skirts so that they would not brush the floor.

"I've been keeping this for you," he smiled.

She gave his hand a quick pressure of thanks.

Not a leaf stirred. The stillness of the silvery night was a thing almost tangible. The perfume of the flowers drugged the warm air with a cloying sweetness.

Dick neither spoke nor moved, but his eyes never lifted from that charming figure so diaphanously filmed in the moonshine.

Forced to it by his silence, the girl looked up and met his eyes. Never in his gusty lifetime had he looked handsomer or more attractive.

"I love you, Jimmie."

"Do you?" It came to her that the night and the scene were in league with him to woo her. Her in-

stinct reached out for some homely act of everyday life as a defence. "You may smoke, Dick."

"I don't want to smoke."

"Oh, yes, you do. Men always want to smoke, but don't like to say so."

"Really, I don't. I've something better to do."

"Absurd. Of course you want to. Give me one, too."

He knew that she was playing for time, pushing his lovemaking from her as all women know how to do even with the men they care most for. But he did not know she was fighting against her own impulses as well as his.

Dick found cigarettes and his lighter.

"The maze is just back of here. You can see the hedge through the lattice."

She was leaning back indolently against the seat. In that shadowy half-light, her dainty evening gown revealing all her sinuous grace and dark charm, she appealed to him mightily.

"I don't think we'll go into the maze to-night. We haven't time. But I love it here. Perhaps you'll bring me again."

"Nonsense. Of course we'll go through it. That's what people come to Beaumont for. Didn't I promise to show it to you?"

"I'll release you from your promise. We must be starting back, Dick."

"No hurry. We'll burn up the road when we do go. And I want you to see the maze."

She let her deep-lidded eyes mock him. "You're so conscientious about my seeing all there is to be seen."

"I'm particularly set on this. It will be a lark. Come, dear."

He contrived to put his wish lightly, but she knew that it was not with the thought of a jolly time he spoke. He was going to make love to her.

While she hesitated, she parried his insistence with a nervous laugh. "I don't believe it would be proper for us to go in so late."

"The only time to see it is in the moonlight. I'm not going to have you miss it. That's all there is to it."

"Then will you go into the inn, make the acquaintance of a nice old lady who hasn't rheuma-

tism, and induce her to be our chaperone?" she asked, tilting a derisive smile at him.

"Yes, I will not. I'm chaperoning this party."

"But . . . won't people talk? Is it really all right to go?"

"Of course it's all right, or I wouldn't ask you. Besides, who knows you're here? Or what do you care how proper it is? Propriety is for frumps, not for my royal sweetheart who sets fashions for others to follow. Who wants to stick around and do as Mother Grundy says? It's the improper things that give life zest. You have to be a little out of the usual to get emotions out of existence. Don't you?"

"Ye—es, but . . ."

"Give me no buts."

She looked at him with the appealing innocence that lay in her deep eyes. "I'm only a girl, Dick. It's all very well for us to talk, but I have to play the game as society tells me to. A reputation is too easily lost. I know I'm as indiscreet as I can be. Really, I've no business being here [illegible] with you alone. I'm safe only because peo[illegible]

Her roguish smile tantalized and allured him. How much, after all, did she care?

He drank a glass of champagne gloomily. "I believe you're a flirt."

"Then there are a pair of us," she laughed.

"I'm not," he protested. "I've never had a chance to play fair yet. You *do* love me, don't you, Jimmie?"

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"Oh pshaw!" He got up and moved impatiently up and down the room. "No use getting annoyed about it. I'm the one that has a right to complain. I'm not a kid and you've got no right to treat me like one."

know we are alone. I told Mrs. Alleyne that Mrs. Lambert was going with us."

"That's all right. As she doesn't know Daphne, your fib will hold water. Now be a game little sport, and don't stick at the maze. I give you my word that people go through it every evening. It's the accepted stunt."

She tossed away her cigarette and rose. "Then let's go, Dick."

She was a little pale, more than a little uncertain of herself and of him. The faint smile trembling on her lips was wistful and dubious.

He slipped his arm beneath hers. "I love you, Jimmie. You know that. For all the world I wouldn't hurt you, dear."

"Wouldn't you?"

In her eyes lay that shadow of world-old knowledge Leonardo fixed as a smile on the face of the Mona Lisa. How many of her sisters in all the ages past had listened to that same plea and believed it until too late? She knew that to-night her blood was racing fast and that it was no time for her to try any experiments in emotional excitement. The

his star was in the ascendent and his spirits rose. Surely he was a devil of a fellow, irresistible with women. There had never been one he could not make care for him—except Daphne. And even she had once been fond of him. Now she was the exception that emphasized the rule.

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Her glance wavered, fell, struggled up to meet his again. What did he mean? Was he speaking of their marriage after he should be free? From her eyes leaped a flame, clouded, quick with emotion and burning with a fierce, vivid intensity.

He waited imperiously for her to join him.

"I don't believe there is any summer house," she charged, eyes bright with excitement.

"Honor bright," he promised.

"And a way into it?"

"If you can find it."

"I can't. Will you be my guide, sir?"

"For a fee."

The sidelong glance of her oval eyes flashed at him. "Name it please."

"You have to pay a retaining fee even to get my services."

"Oh, do I?"

He nodded his head slowly, his eyes fastened to hers.

"I'm not sure I want a guide through the labyrinth then, sir."

"But you can't get either in or out without one," he exulted.

"You'll not be . . . extravagant as to a fee, will you?"

In another moment she was in his arms, and he was kissing the Rosetti mouth.

"This is the retaining fee," he whispered.

CHAPTER XIX

"You're to come up to Mrs. Lambert's office, sir."

Hilary disposed of his hat and followed Flanders. Partly as an excuse to see Daphne often and partly because he was by nature an energetic man, the engineer had been working out the problem of an extension of the estate irrigation ditches. He had made surveys and maps. This morning he had brought the plan of his proposed system to show the mistress of Red Holm.

Daphne was at her typewriter. She rose when Gordon was announced and shook hands with him.

"You've brought the plans with you?" she asked.

"Yes. I finished them last night."

"That's good." She turned to Flanders. "I'll be busy with Mr. Hilary for half an hour. If anybody wants to see me let him wait, or if it's important call me on the 'phone."

After the door had closed on Flanders and his

"God has been good to us. A little life is on the way."

A low hoarse cry leaped from Gordon's throat. He turned to her. The fringes of her eyelids had fallen to the warm cheeks. She breathed fast. Already she was quickening to a more radiant life.

He knelt on one knee beside her and took her in his arms and held her tightly. No words could express the feelings of love and pride and tenderness for her that surged through him.

Neither of them said much. She shed a few tears of happiness, for she knew her news had knit her and her lover more closely together. Later there would be many things to talk over and to decide, but all of these could wait. The great fact was enough. All the joy of the world welled up in the knowledge that she was to be the mother of Gordon's child. It sufficed for both of them, filled their universe for the time.

Before he left she broached one difficulty.

"Dick will have to be told. He must hear it first from me or in his surprise he might talk. Shall I send for him now, or wait?"

"Neither. I'll tell him before I go," Hilary announced.

"Do you think that best?" she asked dubiously.

"Decidedly so. I'll handle Mr. Dick if you'll give me a free hand."

She was relieved and let him know it. "I didn't want to talk about it to him. I'm so happy, and, of course, he'll storm. It's good of you to take it off my hands, dear."

"Is it?" His strong, confident smile came out for a moment. "He'll not do any storming before you. Don't worry for a moment, dear."

She turned her cheek so that it brushed his softly. "If he *should* talk after all," she breathed.

Her lover's jaw was set like a vise. "He won't. Leave it all to me, sweetheart. I've got the whip hand over Mr. Dick—and he's going to find it out."

"You mean——?"

"Never mind what I mean, Madam Inquisitive," he laughed. "Just be sure of this. No matter how angry he is he'll behave like a lamb."

She asked no more questions. Her confidence in

him was implicit and she believed he would succeed in doing whatever he promised to do.

Within the hour Hilary met Lambert. He had walked down to the Plimford meadow to make sure that the course he had decided on for his ditches was the best one. While making some notes on the back of an envelope he heard the sound of approaching footsteps. He looked up to see Lambert.

"You've been up at the house," the latter said sharply.

"Yes."

"You saw my wife there."

"I saw Mrs. Lambert," Hilary amended.

"You see her every day, don't you?" Dick's voice and manner were both truculent.

"Pretty nearly every day. I'm making the plans for irrigating the new section just bought, and for draining the surplus water."

"I won't have it. We can drain the estate without your help."

"I think you could—if Mrs. Lambert would consent," Hilary retorted coolly.

The other man flushed. "That's none of your

damned business. I've got a word to say to you, Hilary. You're paying too much attention to my wife. Every evening you take a walk. Where do you go? At the same time she's usually missing, too. People will get to talking. I won't have it."

"Won't you?"

"No, by God, I won't. I don't care how often you're named as co-respondent in divorce suits, but I don't want any of them to be mine. Understand?"

They faced each other, the rapier flash in their eyes.

"Have you anything more to say?" Hilary asked steadily.

"Anything more that is necessary?"

"Then get through with it, sir. I don't like your manners."

"I didn't come here to discuss my manners, but your morals. Your intimacy with my wife must cease at once."

Lambert's hands were clenched. His chest was beginning to rise and fall. He knew this man was stronger than he in every way, and that his weak-

ness showed in his agitation, but he could not assume the tone of cold disdain he had intended.

"Intimacy?" Hilary's eyes were cold as jade. They did not release the other for an instant. He intended first to find out how much Lambert knew.

"Acquaintance . . . friendship . . . relationship. Choose whatever word you like," Lambert ripped out irritably. "I'm not fool enough to suppose that she cares anything about you. The point is that your pursuit of her arouses comment."

"In what quarter?"

"Never mind in what quarter. That I say it, is guarantee of its truth."

The engineer smiled, a little contemptuously. He knew perfectly well that Jimmie Dixon had stirred the man's jealousy through his vanity, but he did not yet see that Lambert wanted to use the affair as a lever to force more money from his wife. Dick had always given Daphne a place apart from other women in his mind. He could not believe that his wife, always cool as virtue and remote as a star in the skies, was actually engaged in a love

intrigue. She was to him the one exception of his creed that all women were to be won when the right man came a-wooing. Still the doubt existed, poignant and inescapable. His hectic imagination tortured him with visions of Daphne in the arms of Hilary, of her lips red as poppies spending their rare kisses on him, of the treasure of her lovely body in his possession. Obsessed as he was by a passion of his own, he could not obliterate the torrid and lascivious brain fancies that danced before him. And even though he had come deliberately to blackmail Daphne through her friend he could not control his rage.

"You may take it from me that I'll not stand for it," Dick stormed on. "You drop out or I'll take this into the courts."

The muscles in the lean face of the Westerner stood out like ropes. "You're prepared to go into the courts, then? You have a clean record, I suppose."

"Never mind my record. I'm discussing yours now. I don't know how far you and Daphne have gone. It isn't a question of how much I can prove.

cousin the day you were married. That contract is in a safety deposit vault and can be produced if necessary."

"Who told you this? Did she?" flamed Dick.

Gordon's gaze chiseled into his. "She did."

"Then . . . you are her lover?" The words came hoarsely.

"I'm her husband, though not yet in the eyes of the law."

A passionate anger boiled in Lambert's soul. "You dare tell me this?"

"I'll tell you more. She hopes to be a mother soon."

Dick struck at him wildly. The blow glanced from the engineer's cheek.

"Once is enough. Don't do that again. I've been resisting for two months the temptation to thrash you within an inch of your life," Gordon told him.

Lambert, blind with jealous fury, used a word one does not apply to a good woman. Simultaneously he struck again.

He might have seen that Hilary was full of the cold rage of a patient man who had reached the limit.

"You will have it," said Gordon, as if to himself.

And immediately Dick got it, straight from the shoulder to the cheek. He fell back with a grunt, then gathered himself for a rush.

Lambert had always fancied himself as a boxer. He knew all that a man can learn of boxing in a gymnasium. Sometimes he had sparred with a professional and held his own. He was to learn now the difference between a boxer and a fighter. Hilary was tough as leather. His muscles had the hard endurance that comes from clean living and daily exercise in the wind and the sun.

His blows were clean and punishing. They had behind them the clean-cut driving force of a quick, strong man with the fighting edge. Dick's rushes ceased. He gave ground and fought on the defensive. Presently he stumbled and went down. He was sobbing with rage and chagrin.

Hilary looked down at him. "Get up."

Lambert cursed him with futile fluency. He was nursing a badly damaged lip.

"You're soft as a girl . . . and a quitter on top of that," the disgusted Westerner told him. "Out in my country a man stands and takes it as long as he can see and keep his feet. But you—Oh, what's the use? You never had it in you to stand the gaff. You've thrown away in your fool dissipations all the little stamina you ever had."

"I fell," the beaten man growled, and his oaths punctuated the explanation.

"If that 's all——"

Hilary dragged him to his feet.

"Damn you! Let me alone," the man whined.

The engineer shook him as a dog does a rat. "You haven't the punch, and you haven't the grit to game it out. You can bully a woman, and that's about all."

"I'll make you pay for this—you and her too," Lambert threatened.

Hilary cuffed him sharply. He was settling for all the wrongs Daphne had for years endured from

the man. Then he jammed Dick up against the fence.

"Stand there . . . and listen to me. You'll do just exactly as I say. I've told you about Mrs. Lambert's condition because it is necessary you should know. You're not fit for her to wipe her feet on, but in the eyes of the law you are her husband. So far as the world goes *you're going to be the father of this child.* Do you understand?"

Lambert called up a spark of spirit. "I'll not stand for it—never in the world."

"I think you will. If you let slip so much as a word, if your friend Miss Dixon so much as murmurs a suspicion, I'll ruin you both."

"What do you mean? What has Miss Dixon to do with it?" Dick asked it sulkily, but a dread was beginning to chill him.

"We'll take you first. Make the least break on this subject and your allowance will be cut off. At the same time suit for divorce will be brought. You'll not get a dollar in settlement, if I know the courts. Moreover, I'll take pleasure in traveling across the continent to thrash you publicly. You'll

not enjoy that. This little rehearsal won't be a circumstance to what you'll get then."

"It's not a square deal," Dick protested. "I've lived up to my contract with Daphne. She's got no right to ask me to stand for a kid."

"She is willing to make a concession. Your allowance will be doubled."

"You mentioned Miss Dixon," her lover suggested sullenly. If his allowance were going to be doubled that was another story. He could overlook the child, since he was in a corner anyway. But he wanted to find out what the reference to Jimmie meant. Did Hilary know something? Or was he talking from gossip?

"Three weeks ago yesterday you took Miss Dixon to Beaumont with you in your car. You reached there about seven in the evening and had dinner in a private room. It was, by the way, a full dress wine affair."

"You spied on us," Dick cried. He was sweating blood, for Jimmie Dixon's brother was a fire-eating Southerner and would surely call him to account if the truth reached his ears.

"My detective did." Hilary did not think it necessary to explain that he had had Dick shadowed in order to be in a position to protect Daphne when the need arose. "From that private room you went into the maze."

"Which is open to the public," Dick interjected.

"Which is usually open to the public, but which had been leased by you for that night and fitted up as a bedroom," the Arizonian corrected. "At least two other people tried to get in and were refused because the guard said the place was closed for repairs. You went in at 9:43. You came out at 12:07. When you reached the Brentford Arms, close to three in the morning, you gave it out that you had been delayed by tire troubles. I can prove this was not true."

Dick broke down. "My God! Does Daphne know?"

"No. But if you—or Miss Dixon—make a move, if the murmur of a suspicion arises about Daphne, the whole story will come out in a divorce suit."

"I swear to heaven, Hilary, it 's a libel against

that pure girl. Think of such a story getting out against her. It 's awful. I'll admit the thing looks bad, but . . . you wouldn't deliberately ruin her reputation because she was indiscreet."

The engineer's eyes were hard and unyielding as granite. He knew the danger was that Jimmie Dixon would whisper the secret Dick might tell her in confidence. Therefore he proposed to stop that young woman's mouth before the harm was done.

"Nobody but you and I know the truth about . . . Mrs. Lambert. If it gets out, even so much as in a whisper, I'll drag you and Miss Dixon into court. I'll prove everything I've told you, and a good deal more."

"And if I don't tell?" Lambert's voice was shaking in spite of himself.

"Your affairs are not in that case my business."

Lambert mopped his bruised face with a handkerchief. "You came at me before I knew it. I expect I look a sight . . . It's a bargain, then. You've got me in a hole. I'm tied so that I can't get out without ruining my friend's reputation—the reputation of an innocent girl. I'm

mum. . . . As for Daphne, I didn't think it of her. But I leave her to her conscience. If anybody had told me that she—that Daphne——"

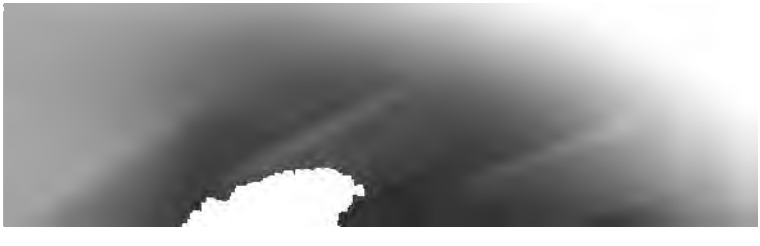
Incisively Hilary cut in. "When you are speaking of that lady I wish you would use her last name, please."

The other man ground his teeth. If looks could kill, Gordon would have been laid low as by a lightning bolt. "Oh, very well! Now, if there's nothing more to be said——"

"There isn't."

Dick turned on his heel and walked away with the nearest approach to dignity a man can summon who has been bullied, exposed, cuffed and beaten. He felt very small, indeed. All the arrogance was gone from the set of his shoulders, all the jauntiness from his tread. The only relief left his surcharged feelings was to curse.

This he did to the best of his ability.



CHAPTER XX

Hilary was eating dinner at the hotel when the news of the accident came. One of the waiters brought it in, and the word was passed in low voices from table to table. It was not until Gordon caught the name of Lambert that he wakened to an interest.

He bore straight down on the nearest group of excited diners.

"What is it? What have you heard?"

"They say that Mr. Lambert has been killed in an automobile accident near Creston," an old gentleman explained.

For an instant it struck him cold. Then he wheeled for the telephone. He got the mayor of Creston on the line. That official corroborated the news. There had been a heavy rain. While going down a steep hill Mr. Lambert had lost control of his machine. It had skidded, plunged over a bridge,

and catapulted into the gully twenty feet below. The young lady with him had jumped just before the car leaped, but Lambert had gone down and been killed instantly.

Gordon asked questions. He learned that the identity of the young lady was not known. She had not been hurt, but was in bed from the terrible shock of the ordeal.

Hilary rented a motor car outside of the hotel and ran out to Red Holm at once. Daphne met him in the hall. She was trembling and was very pale.

"I've just heard—over the telephone. Is it true?"

He gave her the truth. "Yes. I called up Creston and made sure."

"Isn't it . . . awful? He left here this morning in high spirits. I heard him whistling while he waited for the car to be brought round. . . . I can't believe it."

He told her the circumstances as well as he could.

"How am I to tell his poor mother? It will kill her."

"Grief seldom does," was all the consolation he could offer.

It was plain to him that as yet she had not considered the bearing of this news upon their lives. He was glad of it. It seemed to him right that for a few days he should take second place in her mind.

"Miss Dixon left Brentford with him in the car this morning. It must have been she that was with him when it happened. Don't you think I ought to run over to Creston to look after her? If she is suffering greatly from the shock I think Antoinette would come to her," Gordon suggested.

"Bring her here if you think best."

"Thank you. I'll see how she is. Certainly someone who knows her ought to be on the ground."

"Please tell her I would have come myself, but my place is with . . . Dick's mother. I really would like her to stay here for a time if she feels she would care to come." She added after a moment: "You will make any arrangements about

. . . forwarding the body . . . that are necessary?"

"Yes."

Hilary drove over to Creston in his rented car. Miss Dixon, he was informed, had been put to bed and was under the care of a trained nurse. He sent up his card and was presently told by the page to go up. The nurse met him in the outer room of the suite.

"Mr. Hilary?" she asked.

He bowed assent.

"She 's been quite hysterical. It must have been a terrible shock to her. I didn't think you ought to come up, but she was so urgent that I gave way. She wants to see you alone. If you can say anything to quiet her, please do so. She seems to feel it was her fault somehow."

Hilary passed into the bedroom. He found the girl greatly shaken by the tragedy. The face she turned toward him was a wan and tear-stained one.

She reached out her hands to him. "I'm so glad you've come . . . so glad. You don't think I

killed him, do you? I'm a bad, wicked woman, but I didn't kill him. How could I when I loved him?"

Hilary sat down beside the bed and took her hands in his. He forgot, just as she had done, that she had hated him because he wouldn't make love to her. He forgot that she was the one woman in the world whom he had been forced to threaten with exposure to save another woman. All he remembered was that she was a girl in desperate trouble who clung to him to help her.

"Of course I don't think that. And you mustn't think it, either. You were his friend. You would have saved him if you could." His low, strong voice was like a rock for her to lean on. The grip of his big, brown hands seemed to draw her out of her despair.

She began to weep. "It was so terrible . . . so terrible. He kept telling me not to be afraid . . . and then I jumped as the car skidded . . . I was stunned. Then I began to call him, and I called . . . and called . . . and he didn't answer. Oh, God!" She covered her face with her hands and the sobs racked her body.

Hilary's arm slid round her and tightened. Gradually the spasms lessened. She knew he was there to help her and she trusted him.

"Come, little girl. You mustn't think about that now. We'll look out for you. Mrs. Lambert told me to tell you that she would have come if it hadn't been for his mother. And she wants me to bring you to Red Holm, where she can coddle you and spoil you." His cheerful voice was at the opposite pole from tragedy.

For a moment her breathing was suspended. "She doesn't . . . know."

"She knows only that you were Dick's friend and present when it happened."

"You haven't told her . . . about me and Dick."

"No."

"She's good to me . . . but I can't go to Red Holm. You know why."

His free hand rested for a moment on one of hers. "You could go . . . and tell her the whole truth. She is a good woman. She wouldn't condemn you."

"It's because she's a good woman she would condemn me. She couldn't understand what it is to . . . do wrong."

"I think she could. Mrs. Lambert has a big, generous heart."

The girl was sobbing again, but gently.

"I . . . want to tell you something. Dick told me that . . . you knew about us. I've always been free with men. When I was a girl I let them kiss me. There's something in me—I don't know what it is—that wants to draw them on." Her wet eyes fell to the bedspread. "And I'm . . . passionate. I've . . . gone to the edge before . . . more than once. But I always drew back till this time. . . . You'll not believe me, because of that night on the golf links."

"I'll believe anything you tell me," he said gently.

Though a young woman of devious ways, she was for once at the confessional. She yielded to her impulse to tell the truth and get the burden of this terrible result off her shoulders.

"I didn't sprain my ankle at all. I did slip, and I let you think . . . " She turned her face

away and looked tensely at the wall. "I wanted you to . . . make love to me. That shows the sort of girl I am. I pretended I was hurt . . . so that you would . . . . go on. I was all ready to fall in love with you if you had let me."

"Does that matter now? We're none of us perfect, you know."

"But you wouldn't have me. So I went back to Dick and . . . killed him. I'm like a—what is it?—a vampire."

The sobs were gone now. She was speaking with dry lips, nerves taut as fiddle strings, big eyes shining fixedly. Plainly she was under a rigid tension which he must help her to escape.

"Fiddlesticks! You're just a little girl who ran away and stubbed her toe and fell and hurt herself. You're not responsible for Lambert. You may be sorry. It won't hurt you a bit to grieve for him. But don't be melodramatic about it. It wasn't your fault it rained."

"I did ask him to stop and put the chains on the wheels. But he wouldn't. He was always such a reckless driver."

"Everybody knows that. An accident was bound to happen some time."

"But it wouldn't have happened now if he hadn't been driving me out. . . . And he wouldn't have been with me if—if we hadn't been . . . lovers. So you see it all comes back to me. It's a consequence of . . . our sin, and I am responsible."

He talked to her for an hour, and when he left he carried her promise that she would let him take her to Red Holm after the funeral. She was going to tell Daphne all about it, and after she had made confession she was going back to her mother.

"I'm going to try to be good," were her last words to him before he went away.

"Fall in love with a good man and marry him," it was on the tip of his tongue to tell her. But he did not say it. She was hardly ready for that advice yet.

Nevertheless, Hilary kept it in his mind, and in due time suggested it, lightly enough, but with a serious intent back of his smile.

"Have you the good man in mind?" she asked,

with the first smile he had seen on her face since the tragedy.

They were sitting on one of the porches at Red Holm. Daphne was on the lawn directing some work the gardeners were doing.

Hilary colored, but did not hesitate. "No, I haven't. But the man will come some day if you are patient."

She sighed. "The right man? He has never come yet." The color stole into her dark cheeks. "And when he comes shall I tell him . . . everything?"

"I don't know. You must decide that yourself."

He was thinking that, with her inheritance of hot-blooded passion and of the coquette's feverish desire for conquest, she would have a hard struggle under the best of circumstances. Only one thing could save her, and that was love. He believed that she had a capacity for giving herself that if it found the right outlet might burn away the grosser elements of her character. With the right man she might still be a happy wife and a good mother.

"I tell you everything," she went on. "You're

my father confessor. Let me ask you something." She faltered a moment before she went on, her eyes fixed on a workman at the edge of the lawn. "Suppose you loved me—Oh, I know you don't and never will. But say you did . . . and I loved you, and told you . . . all about myself. What would you do?"

Her flushed eyes swept round to his and challenged them for the truth.

He answered without flinching. "I would love you more, because you would need my love more."

She drew a deep breath. "Thank you. I believe you. But most men wouldn't. They don't want damaged goods."

"The goods wouldn't be damaged. They would be purified by repentance and confession. We're always making new starts in life, you know." He smiled an apology for his sermon. "I don't want to be preachy. And I don't know what most men would do."

"I know. They would turn their backs on me—after they had first tried to get me to go wrong

again in the name of love. But that isn't the question now." Into her big liquid eyes had come a look of worried pain. "What about me? Suppose I fight the battle against my nature . . . and win. Will I be good enough for a good man . . . and to be the mother of little children? The future doesn't wipe out the past, does it? What 's done is done. It's like an ugly wound that won't ever heal. That's the law, isn't it, that a woman who has lost her purity can't ever find it again?"

"No, that's not the law. Souls can be washed clean just as bodies can. The world is a liar when it denies this."

"But how?"

"By love—by sacrifice—by winning your fight. The way will open."

"Perhaps. Who knows?" She spoke to him almost in a whisper. "When he comes, if I have the courage, I'm going to tell him the truth."

Daphne was moving across the lawn toward them. The girl rose and held out her hand to him. Unshed tears were scorching her eyes.

"You'll want to say good-by to Daphne before

you go. Let me thank you for all your goodness to me. I . . . I'll remember it.

"You've done a great deal for me, both of you. I'm going to fight. I'll not give in . . . if I can help it."

She turned and walked quickly into the house.

Daphne stood on the lowest step and looked up at Hilary. Her lips trembled. He was going to leave for the Southwest in an hour.

"That's settled anyhow. We've decided to terrace the place by the tennis courts." Her voice choked a little. "Will you come up to the office?"

He fell into step beside her. They were going to say good-by.

As soon as the door had closed on them he took her in his arms and kissed again and again the scarlet-flower lips.

"My precious . . . my precious!" he breathed.

"Gordon . . . Gordon! How can I let you go?" The words welled from her in a cry of anguish.

He held her tightly in his arms, as if he would keep her against the world.

CHAPTER XXI

Hilary was the first man to descend from the train with his suitcase. He looked around eagerly. Flanders stepped forward and touched his hat.

"Good morning, Mr. Hilary. Glad to see you, sir. Mrs. Lambert sent me in for you with the runabout."

Five minutes later they were spinning through the country. The land was in the first flush of early summer, and its green coolness delighted the eye of the man just back from Arizona.

"How is Mrs. Lambert?" he asked presently.

"Quite well, sir. And the young lady is a picture of health. It's a fair treat to see them together."

The desire in the engineer's eyes quickened. It had been nearly a year since he had seen Daphne. It had taken all his willpower to stay away when

the baby was born, but she had been very resolute against his coming.

Before they reached Red Holm Flanders deflected the car. The passenger asked no questions. He knew that Daphne must be at the cañon cottage. As they drew up to it his heart beat fast.

The door of the house was open. Gordon stepped inside. A note held down by a paperweight lay on the table.

"At the Forest of Arden."

It was signed Daphne.

Hilary strode across the brown-green hill, his heart in turbulent excitement. He was going to meet his sweetheart, the girl he was to marry within twenty-four hours. His stride quickened. He could scarce keep from running. What a wonderful world it was! He had to shout out his approval to the meadow lark throbbing out his song from the top of a telegraph pole.

"You're right, old chap. It is love that makes the world go round."

His instinct told him where he would find Daphne. He followed the course of the brook up

stream, crossed on the stepping-stones, and caught a glimpse of her among the ferns. She was clapping her hands for a baby sitting on a blanket in front of her. The youngster crowed and beat her dimpled little pink palms together.

The mother heard his footsteps on the gravel. Instantly Daphne got to her feet and turned. For a heartbeat she stood poised, then, with a glad cry, broke into a run toward him.

"Daphne!"

"Gordon!"

They were in each other's arms, kissing each other with a passionate emotion of joy. Her senses reeled under his hungry kisses. All she felt but could never express, all the pent-up love of the last starved year, found a vent through the lips in rapturous bliss. It seemed he could never have enough of her. Heart beat against heart as he held her close. She drooped on his shoulder with the sweet certainty that now she was in his arms all was well with the world. If she lived a hundred years no moment could be fuller of ecstasy than this. Her lover had come back to her, and it was exquisite

delight to see the fierce gladness warring with adoration in his face.

He held her from him while his eyes searched her face and traveled down the curves of her cheek to the full white sweep of the throat.

"At last! Beloved!"

He snatched her to him again and found once more the red, red lips. Gratitude and love welled up like a song in his heart. No need for concealment any longer. They belonged to each other. The smug approval of the world they could have for the asking. They did not need any longer to fear discovery or the consequences of being together.

Suddenly the child raised its young voice in a protest against being so unceremoniously abandoned. Daphne returned hurriedly to the blanket among the ferns and snatched up the babe.

"She's calling for her daddy," Daphne interpreted with a wonderful smile at Hilary.

A surge of emotion brought her lover forward. This radiant young Madonna was his wife in fact, would be his wife in law to-morrow. He had never

seen her so lovely. The lines of her figure were softer, more fully developed. An expression transfigured her face that was the divine stamp of maternity. She was holding out the child to him.

He took the little one awkwardly and looked down at the fat, pink legs and the laughing face beaming a chuckle of chortling delight. He poked a finger at her and she caught hold of it with her chubby, dimpled fist.

"Your daughter has adopted you, sir," Daphne told him, her cup of happiness full.

Something infinitely tender stirred in Hilary's heart. His daughter! And he had never seen her before. Could anything on earth be half so precious as this toothless little dimpled creature, this inarticulate, soft being whose tiny fingers were already claiming him? What in life could be so dear, except its mother?

He glanced at Daphne and it seemed to him that as their gaze met she drew his soul through his eyes as the mist is drawn from a valley by the sun.

"Are you . . . satisfied, *Father?*" she flashed at him.

"I'm humbly grateful . . . *Mother.*"

Over the body of their child the lips of the lovers met softly.

Slowly they walked back together through their Forest of Arden. Hilary did not offer to return the child, and Daphne was proud and glad that he had so instantly claimed a joint ownership.

"You don't know how I longed to come back when she was born. I lived in hell till I knew you were all right."

"I knew you were with me in spirit. I could feel you beside me," she told him in a low voice.

"Anyhow, that's past now. I'll never again be away from you for any length of time." He breathed deep with relief at the thought.

"It was part of the price we had to pay for breaking the law of society."

"Are you sorry? Did it ever seem too much to pay?"

She answered in almost a whisper. "No . . . not too great a price. Our love was beautiful, and we were happy . . . and God blessed our joy by crowning it with fruitfulness. But sometimes I

have cried out in my soul for you, and sometimes I've had to tell humiliating lies."

"Ah! That's it. You've paid and paid, while I went scott free. I took all you had to give, and left you to bear the burden."

She put her fingers on his lips. "You gave me the best hours of my life. You made existence something fine and glorious for me. Our relationship in itself was perfect, but when the circumstances of it touched outsiders . . . I couldn't help hating the falsehoods and the deceits that were inevitable."

"The situation would have grown more difficult as the years passed, and always you would have had to bear the brunt of it. I'm glad we're out of the woods with a plain, straight road before us clear to the golden sunset."

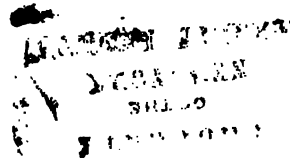
She nodded assent. "The safe way is the best way. I regret nothing. I'm glad I found courage to follow the short cut we did. But . . . It's a hard way to travel, and the road is rough and stony. I'm glad I've escaped." And she slipped her hand into his.

Her words jogged his memory. "Into another cage?"

"Yes, a cage where the bars are of love and my dear husband keeps the key in his heart."

The glory of the dawn was in her uplifted face. Life stretched before her, a beautiful dream. It called her to her destiny, and she faced the future gladly. For she walked toward it with her lover's hand in hers.

THE END



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